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SERMONS

ON THE

Following SUBJECTS,

VIZ.

Our breath and all our ways in the hand of GOD.

Of thoughtfulneſs for to morrow.

Of the nature, pleaſures, and advantage of devotion.

Of the change made in the earth by the Deluge, and its renovation after it.

Religion one thing, and the one thing needful.

The character and bleſſedneſs of the poor in ſpirit.

The character and bleſſedneſs of thoſe that mourn.

The character and bleſſedneſs of the meek.

The character and bleſſedneſs of thoſe who hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs.

By the late Rev. Mr. HENRY GROVE, *of* TAUNTON.

Publiſhed from the Author's MANUSCRIPT.

VOL. I.

LONDON,

Printed and ſold by M. FENNER, at the *Turk's Head* in *Gracechurch-Street*. MDCCXLII.

SERMONS.

BEING

TWO ADDITIONAL VOLUMES

OF THE

Posthumous Works

Of the late Reverend

Mr. *HENRY GROVE*,

OF TAUNTON.

Publiſhed from the Author's MANUSCRIPT.

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MDCCXLII.

THE

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THE

PREFACE.

THE favourable reception which the publick has given to the former Volumes of Mr. *Grove*'s Sermons, makes it unneceſſary to ſay any more in recommendation of theſe, than that they are the *genuine* Works of the ſame excellent Preacher, and 'tis hoped will be found not inferior to thoſe already publiſhed. Theſe Volumes have this peculiarly to recommend them, that the Diſcourſes which they contain are, for the moſt part, on particular *Duties and Virtues* of the chriſtian life, moſt uſeful ſubjects, though not the moſt common, or eaſy to be well treated. Did chriſtians, who juſtly value themſelves on having the beſt religion, conſider it more as the great deſign of their religion, to make them the beſt of men in every character and relation of life, and by forming

forming them to a divine temper here, to prepare them for a divine happineſs in the everlaſting ſtate; and that they could no farther, with reaſon, hope for the bleſſedneſs, than as their tempers were thus ſuited to enjoy it, chriſtianity would, thro' their good converſation, appear to much greater advantage in the eye of the world, and they themſelves be rendered much happier by it here, as well as for ever. That theſe moſt deſireable ends may be greatly promoted by the following Sermons, the *Editor* heartily commends them to the reader's ſerious peruſal, and to the divine bleſſing.

THO. AMORY.

THE

SERMON I.

Our breath and all our ways in the hand of GOD.

Preach'd on New-year's day.

DANIEL v. 23.

----*The God in whoſe hand thy breath is, and whoſe are all thy ways, haſt thou not glorified.*

IT is a very common thing for men to be ambitious of the power and greatneſs of this world, whether they are fit for them or no; nay generally the *leſs fit*, the *more fond* of them: but the inſtances of thoſe who know how to uſe their power with

moderation, and who in the midſt of the temptations which greatneſs brings with it, can preſerve a due ſenſe of their own frailty and imperfection, and of the uncertain and changeable nature of human proſperity, are exceeding rare. They whom Providence raiſes much above the common condition of mankind are generally apt to forget themſelves, and deſpiſe thoſe below them to that degree, as if they had changed their nature with their condition, and were no longer either fallible, or mutable, or mortal: of this we have two very remarkable examples in *Nebuchadnezzar* king of *Babylon*, and his *ſon*, or rather *grandſon*, *Belſhazzar*, againſt both of whom *Daniel* in the name of the moſt high God denounced ſevere judgments, and ſaw his threatnings accompliſhed. 'Tis to this *laſt* the words of the text are addreſſed, as a *reproof* of his inſolence and impiety: I ſhall take them out of the hiſtory to which they belong, and conſider how they may be made more generally uſeful.

THERE are two *Obſervations* which lie plain in the words, and well deſerve our moſt careful attention.

I. *OUR breath and all our ways are in the hand of God.*

II. WHO-

II. WHOEVER is not moved by this conſideration to *glorify God*, is without all excuſe.

I. *OUR breath and all our ways are in the hand of God.* Before I enter on the explication and proof of this Propoſition, I would take notice of the *meanneſs* of man as to his preſent *mortal* Being, which is intimated by the manner of expreſſion here uſed, and ſet in oppoſition to the *greatneſs* of God. What is man, and wherein is he to be accounted of; lord of this lower creation, yet like his mute ſubjects in this, [a] *that his breath is in his noſtrils?* To breathe is to live, but not to be able to live without breathing, is an argument that our life is of the loweſt kind, and very frail and precarious. The child in the womb lives tho' it does not breathe; the lungs do not act, and yet the blood circulates, by means of a paſſage which nature has prepared for it, without its entring into the lungs; which ſhows that the air is not of ſuch abſolute neceſſity to the life of the body, but that if God had ſo pleaſed, the lamp of life might have been maintained without it. And why then is it ſo ordered, that as ſoon as we come into the world we muſt *breathe* or *die?* It is a ſufficient anſwer to this queſtion, that God has choſen this

[a] Iſai. ii. 22.

method, becauſe upon the whole it is the *wiſeſt*; and perhaps, one thing which demonſtrates the wiſdom of it is, that in proportion as there are *more* things neceſſary to the preſervation of life, and *all* thoſe things are made to conſpire for this end; the proof of a Providence which watches over the life of man is more ſtrong and convincing, and we have more frequent remembrancers of our dependence upon God, and obligations to him. But be this as it will, it is matter of fact, that the body at preſent cannot continue to live without *reſpiration*, from whence, perhaps, it has the name of an *animal* life, the *latin* word *Anima* originally ſignifying *air* or *breath*. And alas, how poor a thing is ſuch a life as this! and how very different not only from the life of the *ſoul*, but of the *body* too in its *glorified* ſtate!

No two things can differ more than the life of the *ſoul* and of the *body* to which it is now united; the ſoul being a *ſpirit* has the *ſpring* of its life and activity in itſelf, independent of all other Beings excepting the Creator; and having no parts which can be divided one from another, it will naturally retain the ſame properties of *thinking* and *willing* forever: but the life of the body is as *tranſient* as that of the ſoul is *fixed*; the dangers to which it is liable both from within and from without are not to be reckoned up:

up: of that next to *infinite* number of parts of which it consists, if any *single* part is out of order, the comfort of life is in some measure lessened, and life itself oftentimes in danger; or tho' the body itself should be in perfect health, how many *accidents* are there which may prove fatal to it? a fly or grapestone getting into the windpipe has been the minister of death. And when then shall we learn to despise the body in comparison of the soul? shall we never be wise, never know how to rate things according to their real value?

LET me add, that this *animal* life is not only inferior to the life of the *soul*, but to the life which the *bodies* of the *just* shall be possessed of after the *resurrection*; that which was [b] *sown an animal body, shall be raised a spiritual body*, without all those frailties and imperfections which cleave to this composition of flesh and blood. And for what reason is man placed in a more imperfect state at first? why is he so much upon a *level* as to his bodily life with other creatures, when it is designed that he should be so much *above* them at last? the meaning of all this is plain; man is now upon his *trial*, and therefore labours under many infirmities, and is beset with temptations of various kinds: let him be contented with his present lot, act

[b] 1 Cor. xv, 44.

well the part assigned him, have his aims and his affections fixed upon an invisible and heavenly felicity, and with christian fortitude press thro' all the difficulties and discouragements which are thrown in his way; and then the time of his probation being over, he shall pass out of this imperfect state, enjoy a life that he can call *his own*, and be placed in a condition as *happy* as it shall be *lasting*.

LET us now, after this short view of the *meanness* of man as to his present *mortal* Being, raise our thoughts to the *greatness*, and *supreme dominion* of God, as it is here represented; he is that great and glorious Being *in whose hand our breath is*, and *whose are all our ways*. The meaning of this expression I shall endeavour to explain under the following particulars.

LIFE is the *gift* of God. The Providence of God *preserves* and *guards* that Life which he hath freely given us. He has an unquestionable *right* to put an end to our lives, and does it whenever he thinks *fit*. In the exercise of all our *active* powers, and much more in the *best* and *noblest* exercise of them, we depend upon God. To him we are to ascribe the *prosperous* issue of all our actions and undertakings. And finally, our condition, and all the circumstances of life through which we pass, are under his *direction*; who is also the

the *author* of all that comfort and happineſs which our enjoyments afford us.

1. LIFE is the *gift* of God, his *free gift*; ſince before we had our Being we could do nothing to merit it; and his *gracious* gift, being beſtowed on every one as a *favour*, and not *originally* deſigned as the foundation of *miſery*. He cannot believe the *ſcripture* who doubts of God's being the author of life to all. [c] *The ſpirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life.* Theſe words of *Elihu* are ſo much like thoſe in which the creation of the firſt man is deſcribed, that they may very well be thought to have ſome alluſion to them. [d] *And the Lord God formed man of the duſt of the ground, and breathed into his noſtrils the breath of life.* [e] *He created the heavens and ſtretched them out; he ſpread forth the earth, and giveth breath to the people upon it, and ſpirit to them that walk therein.* To add no more, what words can be more full, as well as more expreſs, than thoſe of the Apoſtle *Paul* in his diſcourſe to the *Athenians?* [f] *He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.* So that the *ſcripture* teaches us to regard God as the *firſt* and *univerſal* cauſe, the great parent and fountain of life; and *reaſon* does the ſame. For as all things which do not

[c] Job xxxiii. 4. [d] Gen. ii. 7. [e] Iſai. xlii. 5. [f] Acts xvii. 25.

move themſelves muſt have their motion communicated from ſomething elſe, till we come to a firſt mover; ſo every Being whoſe life had a beginning, muſt derive its being and life, either *immediately*, or *remotely*, from a Being who is without all beginning of time, and has life in himſelf. The life of man is dependent and borrowed. It is but the other day that the oldeſt perſon among us began to exiſt; and not many thouſand years ago that the human race had its original. Or if we ſhould indulge our imaginations, and go back millions of ages, yet we muſt at length arrive to a *firſt* man, and to a *firſt* cauſe or maker of that man. This *firſt* man then was brought into being by the *immediate* power of God. And now that life is tranſmitted in a continued line from father to ſon, it is the *gift* of God no leſs, *properly*, than it was at firſt; tho' it be not given in ſo *immediate* a manner. The courſe of nature, in which things go on with an amazing regularity and conſtancy from one generation to another, was *eſtabliſhed* by God, and he ſtill *ſuperintends* it, and *concurs*, by his agency, to every effect as far as there is occaſion; which, perhaps, in ſome things, (and particularly in the inſtance now before us) is much farther than ſome imagine; which made the *Pſalmiſt* ſay, [g] *Thou haſt*

[g] Pſal. cxxxix. 13, 14.

haſt covered me in my mother's womb. I will praiſe thee for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works, and that my ſoul knoweth right well. To a living body, which God has framed with the moſt ſurprizing ſkill, he has united an intelligent ſoul, which is evidently the *immediate* offſpring of the great Father of ſpirits. Nothing leſs than the wiſdom and power of almighty God are ſufficient to give being to a *rational ſoul*; the time and manner of whoſe production our earthly parents know not, and in producing which they can claim no ſhare. In the *reciprocal* actions of the body and ſoul conſiſts the life of man. And why hath God given man a *nobler* life than that of the beaſts? The life of man being of a mixed kind, animal and rational, and the former only in ſubordination to the latter, was it with no other deſign than that the greater part of mankind might be the more *miſerable*, without ever having the opportunity put into their hands of being happy? then muſt we ſay of *reaſon* that it is a *fatal* gift, an *unhappy* privilege; and that man, the bulk of the ſpecies, is of all creatures moſt miſerable. But let us not give way to ſuch a thought; life is a *favour*, it was *intended* as ſuch, and as ſuch may be *improved* by us all to the obtaining of a happineſs ſuitable

to

to the dignity and duration of the reasonable part of our nature.

2. THE Providence of God *preserves* and *guards* that life, which his *goodness* has bestowed upon us. [h] *O Lord, thou preservest man and beast. He holdeth our soul in life.* We are taught to pray that our heavenly Father, would [i] *give us day by day our daily bread*; that is, all things needful for the present life. There are many things without which life could not be sustained; all these things are supplied by the *hand of God*, by what *other* hand soever, and in what way soever we receive them. The fruitfulness of the earth is owing to a concurrence of causes, all which are dispos'd by God in order to produce this effect. Showers and sunshine, summer and winter, day and night, the temperature of the air, and motion of the winds, with other things which might be nam'd; all these does God ordain and guide, by which means *the earth is full of his riches; he causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man; that he may bring forth food out of the earth.* All the tribes of living creatures are provided for by this great housholder; *they all wait upon him, and he giveth them their food in due season: that he giveth them they gather; he openeth his hand, and they are*

[h] Psal. xxxvi. 6. —lxvi. 9. [i] Luke xi. 3.

are filled with good. In these and other such like strains of pious eloquence does the *Psalmist* celebrate the works of God in the 104th *Psalm.* Let us farther consider, that we might have food to eat, and raiment to put on, and yet not be *nourish'd* with our food, nor warm'd with our raiment; the *commonness* of the thing may hinder our attention to it, but to those who have a right notion of the matter it will appear a most convincing proof of divine Providence, that life is maintain'd so long by such means. To separate continually from the food in our bowels the small parts fit for nourishment in infinite number, to convey them thro' the finest pipes into the blood, and thence distribute them to all parts of the body, and lodge them in their proper places for the support and repair of the animal life, evidently requires nothing less than the constant superintendence of the supreme wisdom, by which [k] *all the hairs of our head are numbred*, and can no otherwise be rationally accounted for. And if we farther reflect on the many dangers that surround us, how many things might happen which if they did would be destructive to us; and that it is not owing to our own foresight and care that they do not; must we not be sensible that they are kept off

[k] Matth. x. 30.

off by an invisible hand? In that hand is our breath, and it is well for us that it is; for where else would it be lodged with so much safety? My life being in his hand is inviolable, till the hour is come which he has appointed to be the period of it; which leads me to another consideration.

3. THE *Lord* of *heaven* and *earth* has an unquestionable *right* to put an *end to our lives*, and does it whenever he thinks fit. [1] *He taketh away our breath, we die and return to our dust.* His *right* thus to dispose of us is indisputable: indeed had life been made over to us as an *absolute* gift, with a promise that we should enjoy it forever, God in this case would have parted with his own right, and given us a claim to immortality, which we know he will do after the resurrection; or had a term been granted us of a certain number of years, till the number was up we should have been secure in the *faithfulness* of God against his *power*: but neither of these is our case; God reserves the disposal of us intirely in his own hand, insomuch that we are never certain, but that the present day, or hour, or minute may be our last. No man has a right to take another's life even with his consent; but God may without their consent take the lives of all men;

[1] Psal. civ. 29.

men; and yet tho' there is no need of our consent, God expects it, and we should chearfully give it. "I acknowledge it, O "Lord, to be just that thou shouldest do "with thy own what thou pleasest! The "Lord has given me life, and the Lord "takes it away, blessed be the name *of the* "*Lord!* I shall not pretend to ask, what "dost thou? but only entreat thee in the "most humble manner that thou would-"est not take me out of this life, till I "am prepared for a better." After all, we are to remember, that tho' God acts *sovereignly* in this matter, yet he is far from acting *arbitrarily*; he has always a *reason* for what he does, whether we see that *reason* or no. We may not be judges of his proceedings, and are not in a multitude of cases; but what then? shall we therefore doubt whether they are just and right? "I "will not, O Lord! give myself the li-"berty to hesitate a moment about a thing "so plain. I hope whenever thou requirest "my soul of me I shall resign it without "murmuring, thankful that thou hast in-"dulged me so long a time, and regretting "nothing else but that I have made no bet-"ter use of it." From what has been now observed, that in fixing the bounds of mens lives God does not act *arbitrarily*, we may infer, that there is no such thing as a *fatal*

a *fatal period* of human life; or such a *decree* as lengthens, or shortens mens lives without all respect to their free actions; because this would not be agreeable to our notions of the wise Governor of the world, who must be supposed to suit his dealings with us to the difference of our conduct, whether good or bad, wise or foolish. Not that from the *length* or *shortness* of mens lives we can know what are their *real* characters. The *barren tree* may stand till it wither with age, while the tree that *bears fruit* is cut down by an untimely stroke. But still, whoever fears God, and commits himself to him, may be confident that God will do that which is *best*; so that if long life be *best* for him, and the *general* interest will allow of it, he shall enjoy it; I say if it be *best for him*, for it may not; and then God will shorten it in mercy; as on the contrary it may be in *judgment* to *wicked* men, that the days of one are *many*, and of another *few*.

4. IN the *exercise* of our *active* powers, and much more in the *best* and *noblest* exercise of them, we have our dependence upon God. To this sense is that of the Apostle [m] *Paul* to be applied; *He is not far from any of us, for in him we live and move and have our being*. We have many *bodily* powers, of any

[m] Acts xvii. 28.

any of which God could deprive us, leaving us our lives themſelves intire. Could he not ſtrike us with a diſeaſe, which tho' it did not kill, ſhould put us out of all capacity to help ourſelves? How eaſily could he *wither* any part or limb of the body, as he did [n] *Jeroboam*'s hand, when he ſtretched it out againſt the *Prophet*, ſo that he was not able to pull it into him again? How eaſily could he ſhut up any ſenſe, the effect of which would be that the ſoul's communication with external objects that way would ceaſe? Our Saviour made *the blind to ſee, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear*, and *the dumb to ſpeak*; now it is of the mercy of God, that he does not give us more frequent inſtances of the *reverſe* of all thoſe miracles; making thoſe to be blind and lame, and deaf, and dumb, who were once able to ſee and walk, and hear and ſpeak. Beſides our *bodily* powers we have thoſe that are *intellectual*; and between theſe two there is a very remarkable connection. The members and ſenſes of our bodies would be of little uſe without the *reaſon* of our minds to employ and guide them; and the *reaſon* of our minds, tho' it be not the reſult of the bodily *craſis* or diſpoſition, does yet in great meaſure depend upon it: from hence it is that a ſudden ſhock of the brain

[n] 1 Kings xiii. 4.

brain has been known to disorder the mind and remove the understanding quite of it's hinges; or the fire of a fever, or a violent passion, or a black and melancholy humour has had such an influence upon the imagination, that *reason* has been rendred useless by it. May we not say that there is no faculty of soul or body the regular enjoyment of which is not very precarious? which among other considerations is a very good reason, why *the wise man should not glory in his wisdom, nor the strong man in his strength*; since in a moment the *wisdom* of the one may be turned into *foolishness*, and the *strength* of the other into *weakness*.

AND if in the *ordinary* use and exercise of our active powers we depend upon God, then as to the *best* and *noblest* exercise of them much more: here it may truly be said, [o] *that without him we can do nothing*; nothing *effectual* to the purposes of salvation; not that God requires of us any thing which we cannot do by that *strength* which he is ready to impart to us in one way or other, for he is not so hard a master as to expect that his servants should do *impossibilities*; but then his concurrence is needful, and shall be afforded us. If it so pleased God he could endow us with a greater degree of strength in our own faculties for holy

[o] John xv. 5.

holy and ſpiritual actions; and in caſe he did ſo, it would be as much of *grace* that we were able to perform our duty as it is now; ſince the gift is the ſame in itſelf, the goodneſs of God is the ſame in beſtowing it, in whatever way it be done. But he ſeems to have choſen the contrary way of diſpenſing his *grace* by *little* and *little*, as we have need; both becauſe it is more ſuitable to the preſent ſtate of trial, and that we might be oftner obliged to call to mind our dependence upon his *grace* and *ſpirit*, and to have recourſe to prayer, and other exerciſes of religion, in order to obtain it.

5. THE proſperous iſſue of all our deſigns and actions muſt be aſcribed to God. [p] *Except the Lord build the houſe, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.* [q] *A man's heart deviſeth his way; but the Lord directeth his ſteps.* Whether his undertakings ſhall ſucceed or miſcarry belongs alone to the *Moſt High* to determine. The *Pſalmiſt* therefore prays, [r] *Eſtabliſh thou the work of our hands upon us, yea, the work of our hands eſtabliſh thou it.* Our deſigns themſelves, or the methods we are ſet upon for bringing them to paſs, may not be well laid; or after we have deſigned and reſolv-

[p] Pſal cxxvii. 1. [q] Prov. xvi. 9. [r] Pſal. xc. 17.

ed well, we may, upon ſome ſlight cauſe or other, alter our deſign, or change our method of proceeding; or while we go on with it, and make ſure of the event, ſomething or other that could not be foreſeen may croſs our purſuit, and diſappoint our expectations; ſo great is the uncertainty which attends all human affairs; and all future events are wrapt up in ſuch thick darkneſs, that the only thing we know beforehand, is, that every thing ſhall be as God pleaſeth, and not as man. *Solomon* has long ſince obſerved, that among the *vanities which are under the ſun*, this is one; [f] *That the race is not to the ſwift, nor the battle to the ſtrong, neither yet bread to the wiſe, nor yet riches to men of underſtanding, nor yet favour to men of ſkill, but time and chance happeneth to them all.* Ordinarily there is a *connection* between cauſes and effects, and they who are beſt qualified for any buſineſs, and apply themſelves moſt cloſely to it, do oftneſt carry their point; this, I ſay, ordinarily happens, as it is fit it ſhould, that there might be room for human prudence and diligence, and that every one might be encouraged to cultivate and improve any gift or endowment in which he excels others: but the chain is not ſo firmly linked together, that we can ever

[f] Eccleſ. ix. 11.

ever ſay, this or that deſign *cannot fail*, it is *impoſſible* the event ſhould be otherwiſe than we count upon, Providence itſelf *cannot* hinder it: alas! they muſt have very little *experience*, as well as *religion*, who can talk at this rate. If we ſhould ſuppoſe a ſhip in the ſame condition as that in which *Paul* ſailed to *Rome*, toſt up and down by tempeſts, *neither ſun nor ſtars appearing for many days together*; as well might the pilot of ſuch a veſſel pretend, by his extraordinary ſkill, to guide it ſafe thro' all dangers of the wild ocean, till it was arrived at the deſtined haven; as any mortal man (be he never ſo great a politician, or ſo prudent a manager) can ingage for the ſucceſs of all his enterprizes, or with certainty of any one of them: for *he knows not what ſhall be, for who can tell him when it ſhall be?* alas; [t] *thou knoweſt not what a day may bring forth.*

6. OUR condition, and all the circumſtances of life thro' which we paſs, are of God's chuſing; and he alone is the author of all the comfort and happineſs which life affords us. Life may be a bleſſing or a curſe, a ſtate of enjoyment or of ſuffering, as God is pleaſed to order it; as *God*, I ſay, orders it, not as *chance* and *fortune*; [u] *for affliction riſeth not out of the duſt*, nor are we in a

[t] Prov. xxvii. 1. [u] Job v. 6.

higher or lower place, juſt as it falls out by the accidental ſhuffling of events; but there is one above us who aſſigns every man his condition, and appointeth him his lot. As God choſe their inheritance for the *Iſraelites*, *the whole diſpoſal of the lots being from him*, ſo the earth is given to the children of men, and divided among them by Providence; tho' it be not done exactly in the ſame manner as the land of *Canaan* was portioned out. It is much, if in the courſe of a few years we do not meet with a great many changes; and whence do theſe changes proceed? we may think of this and that cauſe, but the *firſt* and *principal* is *God*, who ordains a variety and ſubordination in the conditions of ſeveral men, that their behaviour might be tried one towards another; and brings about changes in the life of the ſame man, that every man might learn to fear before him. It is remarked concerning the wicked, that [w] *becauſe they have no changes therefore they fear not God*; having no conſiderable alterations for a long time together, they are ready to conclude, that Providence has nothing to do in human affairs, or, at leaſt, they do not make any reflections upon it. Thus it is when men have an eſtabliſhed health and proſperity, and no evil occurrence falls in to humble and mortify them; they forget

[w] Pſal. lv. 19.

get that God is the author of their bleſſings; the conſequence of which is, that with all their health and proſperity they are not the moſt happy men; for that [x] *a man enjoy the good of all his labour is the gift of God.* Happineſs does not *neceſſarily* ariſe out of any ſet of enjoyments whatſoever, but depends upon the *temper* of our minds, and the *notion* we have of ourſelves, and of our condition; as both theſe depend upon a ſecret influence of divine Providence. Haſt thou a comfortable enjoyment of the good things of life? is thy Being a pleaſure to thee? canſt thou look round thee with delight, and doſt thou feel thyſelf agreeably affected within? all this comfort and happineſs flows from the fountain of all good.

Having thus proved the firſt Propoſition, *That our breath and all our ways are in the hand of God,* I am

II. To ſhew you that whoever is not moved by this conſideration to *glorify the God above him,* is without all excuſe. To *glorify God* is piouſly to acknowledge his ſovereign, his wiſe, his gracious Providence, to reflect with all thankfulneſs of heart upon the inſtances of God's watchful care over us in times paſt, humbly to reſign ourſelves to his conduct and diſpoſal for all future

[x] Eccleſ. iii. 13.

time, and to frame our whole demeanour as becomes thoſe who believe and conſider, that *their breath and all their ways are in the hand of God.*

1. To *glorify God* is piouſly to acknowledge his ſovereign, his wiſe, and his gracious Providence. It is the glory of God that his *kingdom ruleth over all*, and that he orders and governs all things in the beſt manner; and as God declares his glory in the works of Providence, ſo we glorify him by *acknowledging* that there is a Providence, and that all the diſpenſations of it are wiſe, and juſt, and good. It is next to impoſſible to ſeparate between *Creation* and *Providence*, ſo as not to believe the latter while we hold the former: but whether this be poſſible or no, it is not ſufficient, if we own that God made the world, unleſs we alſo believe, and are not aſhamed to confeſs our belief, that he exerciſes a continual Providence over the work of his own hands; for otherwiſe we rob him of all that glory which reſults from the diſplay of his perfections in upholding this complicated frame of things, preſerving its regularity and beauty, and conducting all the affairs of it to the accompliſhment of the beſt ends. Nor is it enough that we are perſuaded of a *general* Providence, which maintains the eſtabliſhed courſe and laws of nature (according

ing to the account of the *Pſalmiſt*, [y] *Forever, O Lord, thy word is ſettled in heaven; thy faithfulneſs is unto all generations: thou haſt eſtabliſhed the earth, and it abideth: they continue this day according to thine ordinances, for all are thy ſervants.)* But we muſt likewiſe be ſenſible of God's *particular* Providence, extending to every individual perſon and event, ſo that there is none ſo inconſiderable as not to have a ſhare in his notice and regard: not only the human race, but the individuals of that race; not only ſome perſons and things of greater importance, but the meaneſt perſon, and the meaneſt affair belonging to that perſon, has its place in the ſcheme of Providence. As *Daniel* here ſays to a great prince, that *his breath was in the hand of God*, and *all his ways* were ſubject to his direction and controul; the ſame might have been ſaid with equal truth of the loweſt of his ſubjects. One man is not *too high* to be dependent upon God; nor any man *too low* to be regarded by him.

2. To *glorify God* is to reflect with all thankfulneſs of heart upon the repeated inſtances of his watchful care over us in times paſt. [z] *Let every thing that has breath praiſe the Lord.* It is he who hath prolonged our breath to this moment; the ſlender thread

[y] Pſal. cxix. 89—91. [z] Pſal. cl. 6.

is not yet broken, becauſe it *is in his hand*; he has added one year to another, and his goodneſs has crowned every year. The *Jewiſh* year ended in *Autumn*, when they kept a ſolemn feaſt by way of thankſgiving to God, who had bleſt the earth with encreaſe, and given them an opportunity to gather in the fruits of it. My friends, have we not had a plentiful year? I might have aſked, when was the time that we wanted what was neceſſary and convenient for us? hath not God directed our way in this journey of life, and proſpered it? or if we have had our croſſes and diſappointments, was it not needful that we ſhould have them? and is it not our own fault if we have not profitted by them? We ſhould endeavour to affect our hearts with a grateful ſenſe of God's goodneſs to us. What could we have done if God had not been about our path, and diſcharged the kind office of a guide and guardian to us? To think that we have been carried through ſo many dangers, and have received ſo many tokens of God's merciful regard to us, ſhould awaken in us the warmeſt ſentiments of love, and zeal, and gratitude.

3. To *glorify God*, is to place our truſt in his Providence, and humbly to reſign ourſelves to his conduct and diſpoſal for all our future time. And, indeed, if we have a due

due ſenſe of the wiſdom and goodneſs of his Providence, we ſhall certainly take this courſe, we ſhall truſt God with our all, and intreat him to do whatſoever ſhall ſeem good in his ſight. " All my concerns are in thy " hand, and there would I have them; if " thou hadſt not charged thyſelf with the " care of them, I ſhould wiſh for nothing " more than that thou wouldeſt do it; " that thou wouldeſt take me and all my " affairs under thy management and diſpo- " ſal." We are all of us ready to ſay ſo much as this comes to; but this ſelf-reſignation is, I fear, too often in words, more than in deed and in truth. Why elſe are we uneaſy, and out of humour, when God does this or that in the way of his Providence, if it be not as we expected or deſired? this is not to *glorify God*; but to be able to ſay from our hearts *the will of the Lord be done:* ſo I pray and ſo I ſhould pray from a firm perſuaſion that *his will* is always *beſt*. We ſhould not doubt, if we do that which is right in the ſight of God, but he will do that which is moſt for our real intereſt, and final advantage, tho' it may not be that which is moſt agreeable to our thoughts and wiſhes.

4. To *glorify God*, is to frame our whole demeanour as becometh thoſe who believe, and conſider that their *breath is in his hand*, and

and *that his are all their ways*; that is, our chief care must be to walk so as to please God, we must carefully perform the will of his precepts, as well as humbly submit to his providential will: we must live in obedience to all his commands, and in all our actions seek his glory; which if we do, we shall lead a holy, and a religious life; this being the only life by which we can reasonably think to honour God, and become intitled to his favour. What is the relation we stand in to God? is it not that of his *servants* and *dependants?* and how shall we act suitably to this relation, unless we study how to discharge the whole of our duty? more particularly we must remember the obligations we are under to worship God, to pray to him, and to praise him; no duty is to be omitted, or negligently performed: in a word, we must do every thing that is proper to testify and declare, that we are possest with an habitual and awful regard to God, and due sense of our dependence upon him; and must glorify God by making [a] the light of our good conversation so shine before men, that others may be induced to glorify him.

ALL these things are meant by our *glorifying of God*; and whoever is not moved thus to glorify him by the consideration that

[a] Matth. v. 16.

that *his breath is in the hand of God*, and *that his are all our ways*, is without excuſe: his ingratitude, his impiety, his folly, are all ſuch, as nothing which can be pleaded will ſerve to extenuate. This is plain whether the reaſon of his not glorifying God be, that he queſtions his having ſuch an intire dependence upon him, or that he does not regard it.

1. SUPPOSING a man does not *glorify God* becauſe he would be thought to doubt of his having ſuch an intire dependence upon him; no excuſe can be offered on his behalf; for what can be ſaid in favour of him who will go about to diſpute what is moſt indiſputable? and pretend to doubt of a thing of which he may be certain? of this nature is the preſent truth, *that man is dependent upon God, and infinitely obliged to him*; the truth of this Propoſition is ſo evident, that no one who is not of a very bad diſpoſition of mind can call it in queſtion: and when it is only out of enmity to the truth that we oppoſe it, eſpecially a truth of this importance, upon which the whole of religion depends; as our oppoſition cannot but be highly diſpleaſing to God, ſo we muſt expect that he will ſooner or later manifeſt his diſpleaſure. If there are any who acknowledge one part of this Propoſition but not the other, who own that *we depend*

depend upon God, but not that we are *obliged to him*, his only design in all his dealings with us being to shew his *power*, not to exercise his *goodness*; what apprehensions must such men have of the blessed God? Before they can entertain such dishonourable thoughts of God as these, they must give the lie to the natural sense and conviction of their own minds, as well as contradict the common notions and universal belief of mankind.

2. SUPPOSING a man not to deny or dispute his *dependence* upon the power of God, and *obligations* to his goodness; but that he does *not glorify him* for want of attending to these things, this also is inexcusable. Shall we be surrounded by the hand of God, sustained and protected by it, and supplied from it, and seldom or never have a thought of all this? not be able to deny our obligations, and yet slight them, and take no care to fulfil them? this I doubt is generally the case. Ask of any, whether they believe there is a Providence, which disposes of the lives of men, and of all the events with which they are filled up, and they will readily say, *yes*; and yet they do not act as if they did believe it, for then they would *glorify God*. The reason of this is, that they are intent upon nothing else but gratifying their senses, and worldly inclinations;

tions; they are engroſſed by preſent things, theſe command their paſſions and their paſſions them; and ſo they have little or no regard to the God who made, and continually preſerves and governs them.

BUT will any one *apologize* for ſuch a conduct? I ſhould think even thoſe will not who are guilty of it. For what can I ſay for myſelf, *if I forget God, and lightly eſteem the rock of my ſalvation?* ſuch a diſregard to the author of our Beings, and of all our mercies, is inexcuſeable; and being inexcuſeable itſelf, cannot excuſe all that long train of ſinful actions which flows from it.

LET us now briefly *apply* this Doctrine.

1. Is our *breath in the hand of God,* who may take it as ſoon, and in what manner he pleaſes, and without giving us any warning of it? let us then frequently conſider, and wiſely improve this important truth. [b] *There is no man that has power over the ſpirit to retain the ſpirit; neither has he power in the day of death;* and *there is no diſcharge in that war.* We have *no power over our own ſpirits to retain them* when they are ſummoned away; let us therefore apply ourſelves to the care of our ſpirits, or ſouls, before they take their flight from theſe earthly tenements; for if once they are on the wing

[b] Eccleſ. viii. 8.

wing there is no calling them back again; nor can they themſelves return if they would never ſo fain. It therefore behoves the ſoul to mind it's own intereſt and concernments while it is in the body, as well as thoſe of its partner, and much more; ſince if it does not mind them in the body, it will be too late to begin to think of them when out of it. Have we no power in the day of death to adjourn that awful day? O let us then, from this day forward, make it the buſineſs of every day of our lives to prepare for the laſt! Is there no diſcharge in that war, but muſt we encounter with this dreadful enemy? O then let us take care to arm ourſelves for the battle, that tho' we muſt die, we may overcome in dying! Life conſiſts of a ſmall number of years; perhaps, the greater part of them is already paſt; perhaps, we have not one more before us; this which we have now begun may be the laſt, it is very much if it does not prove ſo to ſome of us; and there is not one of us can be ſure it ſhall not prove ſo to him. Let us therefore live while we may live, I mean, in the beſt ſenſe of that word; that is, let us live to God, and for Eternity; and then as we ſhall live more comfortably, ſo we ſhall have reaſon to die more contentedly.

ARE

2. ARE all *our ways* under the divine direction? all our actions or designs subject to his over-ruling Providence? then let us *commit* all our ways to him, avoiding the two extremes, of *boasting ourselves of to-morrow*, and of *thoughtfulness* about it. Our right way lies between these two extremes, and is easily hit if we sincerely desire to find it: we should do as travellers, who, if they pursue their journey in the night, and in dangerous ways, take a guide with them: we may have such a guide as is infallible. *No man knoweth what is good for man, the few days that he spendeth as a shadow*; but that which no man knoweth either in respect to himself, or any other man, God knows with regard to us all; and the good he knows he can bestow, and avert all the evil. This then is a short rule for being wise and happy, [c] *to trust in the Lord, and do good.* We may reasonably suppose, that *future* time will in this be like the *past*; that we shall meet with a great many unforeseen events, and that all of them will not be pleasing; but tho' not acceptable upon their own account, yet let them be welcome as they come from God. Every *good* man is in that condition, which every *wise* man should desire to be in; having infinite goodness to concern itself about him, infinite wisdom to chuse

[c] Psal. xxxvii. 3.

chuſe for him, and infinite power to remove every thing which ſtands in the way of his happineſs. Be it therefore our ſincere deſire, and earneſt endeavour, to be good; to be good, becauſe the thing itſelf is deſirable; and to be good, in order to be happy: in this caſe, whether we wake or ſleep, whether we are going out or coming in, framing a deſign or executing it, in health or ſickneſs, in peace or trouble, Providence will watch over us, and having led us ſafe through the moſt intricate and dangerous ways, will make our *end to be peace.*

SER-

SERMON II.

Of thoughtfulneſs for to morrow.

MATT. vi. 34.

Therefore take no thought for the morrow; for the morrow ſhall take thought for the things of itſelf; ſufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

IN theſe words our bleſſed Saviour ſums up his diſcourſe againſt a *ſollicitous* care about the things of this life; of which he had been ſhewing his diſciples both the *ſinfulneſs* and *folly* in ſome foregoing verſes. He who had freely given them what was more valuable (as *life is more than meat, and the body than raiment)* would not deny them what was leſs ſo; and yet neceſſary to the enjoyment of the former—The God and Father of the univerſe would not ſurely for-

get and neglect his own *offspring*; he had not done it with regard to creatures of a much inferior rank, and therefore could not be ſuppoſed to overlook them, who were much better, and more conſiderable than the other. 'Would all their care and anxiety profit them any thing? would it make any addition to their lives, or to their happineſs? no more than it would to their ſtature.—Had their bountiful Creator *cloathed the flowers of the field* with ſuch exquiſite beauty, that no art of man could compare with it; and would he leave that *noble creature* unfurniſhed, for whoſe ſake principally he ſeems to have adorned and beautified external nature? —In them who had the *knowledge* of the *true God*, and of the *true happineſs* of man, it would be moſt inexcuſable of any to be full of uneaſy thoughts about the events of this *momentary* life, and how they ſhould procure the enjoyments of it: it was enough for the *Gentiles* to be taken up with the care of theſe things, who had not thoſe clear notions of the Providence of God, nor that covenant relation to, and intereſt in him, which they had.—That *their heavenly Father knew them to have need of theſe things*, and in what degree, was alone ſufficient to ſatisfy them that they ſhould want nothing really needful and convenient for them.—Their chief buſineſs and concern ought

ought to be to *ſeek the kingdom of God* which was now come unto them, and *the righteouſneſs thereof*; to attend to thoſe propoſals which the goſpel made them of future and eternal bleſſings, not doubting but that all other things ſhould be ſuperadded to the promiſe and hope of eternal life, [a] *which is the gift of God through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Take therefore no thought for the morrow*, &c. Having the proſpect of an everlaſting life, and of everlaſting happineſs in that life, you have no reaſon to be ſo extremely concerned about the futurities of a life ſo ſhort and ſo inconſiderable as this, whatever they ſhould happen to be.

EVERY one knows that the words *to day*, and *to morrow*, are not always taken in their ſtrict ſenſe for ſuch an exact portion of time; but are frequently uſed to ſignify the time *preſent* and *to come*. Inſtances of this are to be met with in the ſacred ſcriptures, as well as in other authors. [b] *And it ſhall be when thy ſon aſketh thee to morrow* (for ſo it is in the *Hebrew)* i. e. *hereafter*, *ſaying*, *what is this*? then thou ſhalt ſay unto him, *&c.* [c] *Boaſt not thyſelf of to morrow, for thou knoweſt not what a day may bring forth.* But then tho' the expreſſion of *to morrow* is not to be reſtrained to the day next following, yet it

 ſeems

[a] Rom. vi. 23. [b] Exod. xiii. 14. [c] Prov. xxvii. 1.

ſeems to ſpeak but of a ſhort time in compariſon with, and in reſpect of ſome longer duration; ſee particularly *Joſhua* xxii. 18. *And it will be, that ſeeing ye rebel to day againſt the Lord, that to morrow he will be wroth with the whole congregation*; i. e. he will *very ſpeedily* ſhow his diſpleaſure againſt us for it. And thus *Iſai.* xxii. 13. *Let us eat and drink, for to morrow we ſhall die*; *i. e.* we ſhall die very ſoon: and therefore by *to morrow* in the text, we are to underſtand *future time*, with the events of it in this world; to expreſs the ſhort duration, and the ſmall importance of which to man, who is deſigned for immortality, the term *to morrow* is employed, which properly denotes no more than the ſpace of a ſingle day. Our whole life upon earth, ſet againſt *eternity*, is to be regarded but as *a day*; nay, has not the proportion of a ſingle day, to all the days of which the longeſt life is compoſed. —And perhaps, another ground of this mode of expreſſion may be the *uncertainty*, as well as the *ſhortneſs* of human life. Tho' we ſhould live a thouſand years twice told, and much more to the extremeſt point of the preſent term, we ſhould have reaſon to ſay, [d] *Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.* But alas! the time to come is ſo totally concealed from us, that we are not

[d] Gen. xlvii. 9.

not ſure we ſhall out-live *to morrow*; and may ſafely conclude, that before *to morrow*, not to ſay the *preſent day*, is gone, thouſands now living in one part or other of the world, will be numbered among the dead: and therefore, on account both of the *ſhortneſs* and *uncertainty* of life, there is a peculiar emphaſis in this expreſſion of *to morrow*, when it ſtands for all the time which is to come, or may be to come on this ſide eternity, together with the various occurrences which are to fill it up.

IN treating theſe words I ſhall,

I. LAY down ſome Propoſitions which may be of uſe to give us a clear and regular view of this ſubject.

II. MORE particularly ſtate or explain the thing here forbidden, which is *taking thought for the morrow.*

III. ENQUIRE into the reaſons of this prohibition; and

IV. CONSIDER the courſe which that *wiſdom which is from above* directs us to take in reference to futurity.

I. I AM to lay down ſome Propoſitions which may be of uſe to give us a clear and regular view of this ſubject. The mind of man is ſtrangely unconfined in its thoughts and operations—is actuated with a deſire of

immortality—has a natural propenſion or curioſity to look into the future events of this life—and by its own prudence and care is capable of making ſome proviſion for the more comfortable and uſeful paſſing of the time allotted us here below.

1. THE mind of man is ſtrangely unconfined in its thoughts and operations.—The preſent moment does not bound its views, no, nor the preſent life, nor any determinate ſpace of time whatſoever. The body is ſhut up within narrow limits, and the ſoul encloſed in this little body, and yet ſo vaſt are the capacities of this ſoul, that by virtue of its thoughts it can ſpread itſelf abroad over the whole creation, and travel into the regions of infinity. Herein the great preheminence of man above other creatures is clearly diſcerned; they appear not to have any notion of the diſtinction of time into *paſt*, *preſent*, and *to come*; the *preſent* ſenſation takes up all their attention; and tho' they have inſtincts by which they are prompted to a great many actions, which reſpect the future preſervation and maintenance of themſelves and their young; yet it ſeems to be without their knowing any thing of the matter, being intirely determined by the impreſſions made upon their ſenſes; they cannot look backward or forwa.d, reflect, and conſider, and compare things

things together: but the proſpect of the human ſoul is in a ſort *unlimited*; it has powers and faculties which other creatures want; and the faculties peculiar to itſelf are much more excellent than thoſe which it enjoys in common with them; particularly, this faculty of *looking before it*, or extending its thoughts into futurity; by this it becomes a *faint image* of the Deity himſelf: I call it a *faint image*, becauſe the ſoul has no foreſight of things future, properly ſpeaking, or command over them as God has; who, in reſpect of this, and all other his perfections, is not only *incomparable*, but *incomprehenſible*. 'Tis however an honour to the human nature that it has any characters, how imperfect ſoever, of the divine excellencies ſtamped upon it. The mind cannot ſee what will be, but it can think of what may be, or is likely to be; it can converſe with things future, tho' not in that perfect manner which God does; and this alone is proof ſufficient that God has made man for a nobler end than other creatures, and for a more laſting felicity.

2. THE mind of man is actuated with a deſire of immortality. Having an idea or notion of an endleſs life, it cannot but wiſh that it's own may be ſo; and this deſire of immortality, conſidered with all its circumſtances, at the ſame time that it ſhows the *excellence* of the ſoul, which is the ſubject

of it, plainly enough indicates that the ſoul is *immortal.* Why elſe is it ſo diſſatisfied with temporary things? why, as often as it meditates on the end of this life, and but ſuſpects that the ſame may be the period of its own being, does it recoil at the thought? if the ſoul has no other ſtate of exiſtence but in the body, and periſhes with that, why do it's deſires ſo unavoidably overflow theſe bounds? why ſhould it be ſo ſtrongly poſſeſt of the hope of immortality, if it has no relation to a future ſtate, and no intereſt in it? It is remarkable, that thoſe who are leaſt thoughtful about *to morrow*, are moſt concerned for eternity; the more indifferent they grow to this animal bodily life, the more does their deſires increaſe of an immortal life employed in the exerciſes of knowledge, and virtue, and devotion. Surely then, as the thoughts and deſires of the mind reach beyond all the limits of time, ſo ſhall its exiſtence too. Therefore is all the time to come of the preſent life repreſented by this *diminutive* expreſſion of *to morrow*; becauſe the ſoul is now but in the beginning of its exiſtence, and in reſpect of thoſe everlaſting ages which are reſerved for it, will be but *a day or two old*, when it paſſes out of this world into another.

3. THE mind has a natural propenſion or curioſity to look into the future events of this

this life. —The moſt proper object of its thoughts and concern is, indeed, that eternal life which is to follow after this, and for this every one who is wiſe will be moſt ſollicitous; but, however, it is not poſſible for the ſoul to diveſt itſelf of all regard to the preſent life, and the condition of its being, while that continues, nor is it expected that it ſhould. The preſent life has its value, and that value very conſiderable too, as ſubordinate and introductory to a future ſtate; and were our concern about the events of this life chiefly in this view of them, it would be very laudable within a *certain degree*, and very *pardonable* when it did a *little* exceed: for 'tis fit that a man ſhould have ſome concern upon his ſpirit about the changes and events of this mortal life, when he conſiders the influence which theſe outward things have upon his *ſpiritual* ſtate, and the influence of that upon his *eternal* one. Nor can it be wondered, if, under an apprehenſion of the infinite importance of ſalvation, he ſhould rather go too far in his ſollicitude about every thing relating to it, tho' never ſo remotely. But alas! 'tis very ſeldom that men trouble themſelves about future time in this ſenſe. Without attending to the connection which the events of this life may have with their condition hereafter, they ſpend many thoughts about thoſe events,

events, as they immediately affect the preſent life; and 'tis natural enough to do ſo; for the ſoul of man being a reſtleſs, active principle, and not eaſily ingroſs'd by the *preſent* time, muſt be oftentimes thinking of what is *paſt*, or *to come*. What is *paſt* is more generally overlooked, becauſe it is regarded as ſomething which is no longer our's, and but little pertaining to our happineſs; and as for the time *to come*, for one reaſon or other, but few love to meditate much on that part of it which is not to commence till after death. The diſtance of the eternal world leſſens it to their ſight, and they are the leſs fond of imploying their minds about it, for fear they ſhould find themſelves obliged to forego thoſe preſent pleaſures, of which they are ſo enamoured; ſo that turning their thoughts more than they ſhould from the life to come, they are, as it were, forced to make excurſions into future time, forming ſuppoſitions, ſchemes, and purpoſes, and entertaining hopes and fears about what is to happen to them while they are in this world.—And as theſe thoughts about future time are *natural*, ſo 'tis not impoſſible for them to be *innocent*; for

4. The mind of man, by its prudence and care, is capable of making ſome proviſion for the more comfortable and uſeful paſſing the time allotted us here below.—

There

There is what we may call a *human* as well as a *divine* Providence. And ſo far is it from being a thing criminal to do all we can to contrive and order things for the beſt, to the end we may be as happy ourſelves, and do as much ſervice to others as our abilities, and the circumſtances we are in, will allow of; ſo far is this from being unlawful, and forbidden, that it is our *undoubted duty*. We are not to underſtand our *Saviour*'s words in the utmoſt rigour, as if we were to *take no thought at all for to morrow*; for how then ſhould the neceſſities of life be ſupplied, and the ſeveral acts and profeſſions be managed and carried on? Cares, of one kind or other, are our portion in this life; nor are any of the children of men to be entirely exempted from them.—As to the good things of this life, we can do ſomething, under the direction and bleſſing of Providence, to procure them; and what we *can* do, the Creator and Governor of the world expects we *ſhould* do; and juſtly makes it the condition of his favourable concurrence with our deſigns. The wiſdom of God will not admit of his doing that in a *miraculous* way, which may be done by the ordinary powers of nature. Hath he given us reaſon? it was with a deſign that we ſhould uſe it. Are we capable of contributing to our own happineſs, and that of others, by thoſe active

tive powers which he has beſtowed upon us? he does then expect that we employ theſe powers in the beſt manner we are able. 'Tis true, [e] *It is not in man who walketh to direct his ſteps*; that is, he is not ſo well qualified to be his own guide, as not to need a higher direction; he is liable to be miſtaken, but he muſt not therefore ſhut his eyes, and think to hit his way blindfold. All his own wiſdom and care will be of little avail in many caſes and emergencies, *unaſſiſted* by the wiſdom and care of a higher Being; and after all, he can neither *aſcertain* nor *foreſee* the event; which is the ground of that obſervation of the wiſe man, [f] *That the race is not to the ſwift, nor the battle to the ſtrong, neither yet bread to the wiſe, nor yet riches to men of underſtanding, nor yet favour to men of ſkill, but time and chance happeneth to them all.* i. e. things do not always fall out according to the probability of *ſecond* cauſes; which is no proof that therefore *ſecond* cauſes are of no value and ſignification; ſince 'tis enough to ſhew the preference of wiſdom to folly, of foreſight to careleſsneſs, of an active diligence to a ſlothful indolence; that they ordinarily produce the effects deſigned by them, and render life much happier than it would elſe be. The Apoſtle ſaith, [g] *He that careth not for his own, and eſpecially*

[e] Jer. x. 23. [f] Eccl. ix. 11. [g] 1 Tim. v. 8.

eſpecially for thoſe of his own houſe, has denied the faith, and is worſe than an infidel. And tho' our bleſſed Lord tells his diſciples, [h] *Labour not for the meat that periſheth*; 'tis plain his meaning is only *comparative*, that they ſhould not labour for theſe dying enjoyments with that concern and application of mind, as for that *good which endureth to everlaſting life.* The *moſt thinking* man, provided he thinks in a right method, is the *moſt prudent*; and the moſt *prudent* (if other things be anſwerable) the moſt *uſeful.* And then as to the evils of life, to which we are liable in this mortal ſtate, [i] *Solomon* obſerves, that *a prudent man foreſeeth the evil, and hideth himſelf; but the ſimple paſs on, and are puniſhed.* To eſcape without ſuffering any of the infelicities and troubles of life, is not to be hoped for; but certainly the man who looks before him, and ponders his ſteps, in the ordinary courſe of things meets the feweſt. How many misfortunes and diſappointments, which oftentimes prove the moſt ſevere afflictions, might have been prevented by timely foreſight? And for this reaſon, our divine Maſter cannot be ſuppoſed to condemn all thought about *the morrow*, the good and the evil things of it; ſince, by a prudent thought and moderate care, we may contribute, in ſome meaſure, to our

[h] John vi. 27. [i] Prov. xxii. 3.

our enjoyment of the good things we deſire, and avoiding the evils from which we would fly. Nay, to think not only for ourſelves and families, but for the publick, not only for the preſent generation, but for poſterity, may be very commendable, on condition our thoughts do not lie as a load upon our minds, and ſtop ſhort of action; but ingage us to do ſomething or other (if it were only to commend their caſe to God in prayer) which may be likely to have an advantageous influence, greater or leſs, more direct or remote, upon the welfare of thoſe about whom we are ſollicitous. Such a thoughtfulneſs as this, argues a *largeneſs* and *generoſity* of mind, and ought, by all means, to be cheriſhed, not diſcountenanced and ſuppreſt. 'Tis no part of the chriſtian character to be a *lover of one's ſelf*, ſo as to be wrapt up in a regard to our private intereſt, not caring how others fare, not even the church of God itſelf, ſo all go well with our own dear perſons. The words of *Hezekiah* indeed look this way, when after the prophet *Iſaiah* had foretold the calamities which would come upon his kingdom and family, he ſaith, [k] *Good is the word of the Lord which thou haſt ſpoken: for there ſhall be peace and truth in my days.* But he does not mean, that he reckoned himſelf to have no

[k] 2 Kings xx. 19.

no concern in what ſhould befal his family, and the church of God, after he was dead and gone; and was as well pleaſed with the peace he enjoyed, tho' he knew it was to die with him, as if he had been to tranſmit the ſame happy condition to thoſe who came after him; no, but he was ſenſible of the juſtice of God's proceedings, and with a pious gratitude takes notice of the goodneſs to him, which was mixed with the ſeverity intended againſt that ſinful nation, of which he was the head and governor, and his own family in particular. The *Prophet* pronounces a *woe* againſt thoſe [1] *who were at eaſe in Zion*, who gave themſelves up to their pleaſures, without ſuffering a thought about the publick intereſt of the true religion, and the profeſſors of it, to interrupt them; not at all *grieved for the affliction* of *Joſeph*, and putting far away the evil day.—But then 'tis very eaſy, and a thing hardly to be avoided without great care, to be guilty of *exceſs* in taking thought for ourſelves or others. And this brings me

II. To explain, in ſome particulars, the thing here forbidden by our Saviour, *taking thought for the morrow.* The original words μη μεριμνησητε might, perhaps, have better been tranſlated *be not ſollicitous:* it ſignifies a care

[1] Amos vi. 1.

a care which exceeds due bounds. So we read of *the cares of this life*, i. e. ſuch cares as the things of this life too often give occaſion to; cares that *overcharge the heart*; too ſtrong and intenſe for the heart to bear, as well as greater than the object and occaſion will warrant. The word uſed by [m] St. *Luke* in a place parallel to the text, is [n] *be not of doubtful mind*, μη μετεωριζεσθε, let not your minds be perpetually hovering and in ſuſpenſe, fluctuating and unquiet, carried hither and thither as *meteors* are in the air, having no fixedneſs in themſelves. I ſhall endeavour to deſcribe and repreſent, in as plain a manner as I can, the ſtate of mind which our bleſſed Lord in theſe words would have us guard againſt. Then are we guilty of this forbidden *thoughtfulneſs for the morrow*, when the mind is too full of theſe thoughts—when they are attended with a reſtleſs anxiety and ſollicitude—when the mind is hindred from paying that regard to Providence, in reference to future events, which it ought—forgets what is paſt—loſes the preſent—and too much neglects the things of its everlaſting peace.

1. THE mind is too full of thoſe thoughts about hereafter. 'Tis always trading, as I may ſay, in this foreign country, and converſing with the fictitious objects with which the

[m] Luke xxi. 34. [n] Luke xii. 29.

the imagination, ever fruitful of ſtrange ſpectres and apparitions, ſupplies it; hardly thinking of any thing elſe, at leaſt the main ſtream of its thoughts run this way. Now certainly this is *over-doing* the matter, and can anſwer no end, or no good one. When the ſoul is perpetually abroad, tranſporting itſelf into diſtant time, and almoſt intirely taken up with the things which are ſuppoſed to happen in it; when theſe are the thoughts which the man laſt parts with at lying down, and which meet and ſalute him firſt at his waking out of ſleep, and ſcarce leave him all the day, ſuch a multitude of thoughts about futurity can never be juſtified: a perſon is never the nearer his aim for them; inſtead of being uſeful, and promoting his deſigns, by their very number they diſtract him, and perplex and entangle one another. We may think *too much*, as well as *too little* of a thing, to think of it to any good purpoſe. The mind tires itſelf with its own thoughts and imaginations, grows dull and ſtupid, is at a loſs what to chuſe and reſolve, oftentimes prefers the worſe to the better, and has little or no ſpirit left to execute its deſigns: ſuch is the natural effect of continual thoughtfulneſs about *to morrow*; inſtead of reaping any advantage from ſo many thoughts about theſe things, the mind is oppreſs'd by

the very multitude of them, and hindred from acting ſo regularly and wiſely as it would elſe do.

2. THEN is our *thoughtfulneſs for the morrow* unlawful, when it is attended with a perpetual anxiety and ſollicitude of mind. A perſon in this temper, not only [o] *walketh in a vain ſhow*, deceived by the imaginations of his own brain, but likewiſe *diſquieteth himſelf in vain:* a thouſand things come into his fancy, which he transforms into an army of enemies; his ſoul is reſtleſs and caſt down within him, overwhelmed with ſadneſs, or perplexed with doubt, or haunted with continual terror and affrightment. And the ground of all this inward diſturbance is an apprehenſion that things will not be as he would have them: either, in *general*, that ſomething or other, he knows not what, will fall out to make him unhappy; or that he ſhall be unfortunate in this or that particular reſpect.—Sometimes he can hardly tell what it is he fears, only he is inclined to fear the worſt; like a timorous traveller overtaken by the night, who trembles every ſtep he takes, and imagines dangers where there are none. 'Tis very certain, in the courſe of human life, we know not how to order our ſteps becauſe of darkneſs; there's a thick cloud between

[o] Pſal. xxxix. 6.

between us and futurity, which no eye can penetrate: and hence ſome perſons take occaſion to terrify themſelves beyond meaſure, with the thoughts of what may lie concealed behind this cloud. They cannot ſay, but the events which they foreſee not, may be merciful and joyous; but they will not make ſuch a ſuppoſition. No, happineſs will never be their lot; nothing is laid up in ſtore for them, but misfortunes of ſome kind or other. But why do they think ſo? is there any thing in preſent circumſtances upon which they found their conjecture? any ſigns and forerunners of the evil day? that's no matter, whether they have any reaſon for it or not, they have determined with themſelves, that the *future* will be the moſt uncomfortable part of their lives —At other times the fancy runs all upon ſome *particular* event, which, perhaps, they earneſtly wiſh may come to paſs, and therefore conclude will not; or earneſtly deſire ſhould not, and therefore perſuade themſelves will happen: their way ſtill is to give the cauſe againſt themſelves; not the merits of it, as deſerving to be croſſed in their deſires and purſuits, (they have uſually a better opinion of themſelves than this comes to) but the deciſion of it, which they take it for granted will be to their prejudice: and thus they run into an

extreme quite oppoſite to that of *boaſting of to morrow.* The *boaſter* is over-ſanguine in his hopes and proſpects; from wiſhing that any thing may be, he immediately proceeds to hope that it will; and from hope to aſſurance. Hath he deſigned this or that? he makes ſure of the iſſue; he has laid things ſo, that he cannot be diſappointed; he has hit upon an infallible method, and without thinking how many unforeſeen accidents may intervene to baffle him in his projects (if nothing elſe, yet death, which may break off all his purpoſes at once) he goes on with the ſame confidence, as if he had life, and all other things, at his command. Such is the error of thoſe who *boaſt themſelves of to morrow.* While they who are immoderately *thoughtful for to morrow*, inſtead of indulging and nouriſhing up their *hopes* more than they ſhould, give a looſe to their *fears*; and *fear*, in ſome tempers eſpecially, is a paſſion, which if not laid under the reſtraints of reaſon and religion, will ſet no bounds to itſelf: not being directed and governed as it ought to be; but, on the contrary, left without all controul, into what a ſtate of ſervitude does it bring the ſoul? with what anxiety does it rack the breaſt? ſo that the man paſſeth his life in frightful dreams: he either fears where no fear is, or his fear offends in the degree:

degree: he is alarmed at every little diſorder, as if he was ſtruck with a mortal diſtemper; at every little loſs or diſappointment, as if it was the ſure preſage of ſome ſore calamity. The reaſon of this is, that he loves this life, and ſets his heart upon the enjoyments of it abundantly more than he ſhould; and as the conſequence of that, has an immoderate averſion to whatever would deprive him of things which he loves ſo exceſſively; and being of an abject and fearful ſpirit, thoſe things to which he is averſe he is thoughtful about; full of care how to prevent, and of fear, leſt after all he ſhould not be able to prevent them. This then is the *ſecond* inſtance, the *thoughtfulneſs for the morrow*, forbidden by our Saviour, is attended with a perpetual reſtleſſneſs and anxiety of mind.

3. IT may be farther known by this mark, that it hinders us from paying that regard to divine Providence, in reference to *future* events, which we ought to pay. The mind plunged in thought, and ſwallowed up of care, in a manner forgets that Providence on which all things depend, and by which they are all directed to the very beſt iſſue. We forget that [p] *our heavenly father knoweth what thoſe things are of which we ſtand in need; and that not a hair*

[p] Matt. vi. 32. x. 30.

of our head can fall to the ground without his permiſſion. We forget that [q] *his kingdom ruleth over all*, and that under his guidance and protection, we are as ſafe and happy as if we had all knowledge, and all power; or if we do not quite forget this, we act as if we did, and 'tis plain we do not conſider it. Our thoughts are buſied about other things, and hence it is that we perceive not the hand of God conducting the whole, tho' viſible enough to an eye of faith. We do not [r] *commit our way to God, and put our truſt in him*, deſirous that he ſhould do what he ſees to be beſt, and ſatisfied that he will. We do not in [f] *every thing, by humble prayer and ſupplication, make known our requeſts unto God*, and leave them, and ourſelves with him, having no care upon our minds in compariſon with the care of pleaſing him, and ſecuring his preſence and bleſſing: no; the perſons deſigned by our Saviour are ſo much taken up with the thought of future events, as to overloook the *duties* they owe to divine Providence, and the *comforts* which a conſideration of it would afford them in a way of well-doing. [t] *They are afraid of evil tidings, becauſe their hearts are not fixed, truſting in God.* And does this deſcribe the ſtate of our

[q] Pſal. ciii. 19. [r] Pſal. xxxvii. 5. [f] Phil. iv. 6. [t] Pſal. cxii. 7.

our minds at any time? intent upon purſuing our aim, and ſollicitous leſt we ſhould not attain it? have we our thoughts taken off from God, and his government and diſpoſal of all perſons and things? is this either not at all regarded, or of no efficacy to compoſe our ſpirits, and teach us to carry it with a wiſe indifference with reſpect to future events? In this caſe, 'tis manifeſt that we are guilty of the fault here forbidden by our Saviour.

4. WE may be ſure that is a forbidden *thoughtfulneſs for the morrow*, which makes us neglect the paſt, and loſe the preſent time, and too much neglect the things of our everlaſting peace.

1. WHEN we forget the paſt. What is paſt muſt not be conſidered after the ſame manner with things which have never been. Both our own ways, and the ways of God are to be remembred by us; *our ſins* and *his mercies*; the former, in order to our humiliation, and godly ſorrow and repentance; the latter, in order to excite our thankfulneſs to God, and to encourage our truſt in him for the future. But when the future, with its imaginary occurrences, fills our minds, what room is there for recollecting the real tranſactions of time paſt? 'Tis very neceſſary that we ſhould aſk ourſelves, at proper times, *what we have done*; and examine the

regiſter, which, if we are wiſe, we keep of the dealings of God with us, and the more remarkable diſpenſations of his Providence in the world, and in the church. How elſe can we make a tolerable progreſs in the duties of the chriſtian life? he who lives without reflection, cannot live as he ought; he can neither give God the praiſe of that goodneſs which has followed him all his days, and ſeaſonably interpoſed for his help and deliverance; nor make a right uſe of his errors and miſcarriages, for the teaching him more humility and watchfulneſs for the time to come. This will be the caſe where a man ſeldom or never reflects; as it cannot be expected he ſhould accuſtom himſelf to ſerious and cloſe reflection, who is inceſſantly prying into the hidden receſſes of futurity.

2. We are *over-thoughtful* about the future when we loſe the preſent. It is the common fate of the preſent time, tho' moſt *important*, to be moſt *neglected*. What are the mercies I enjoy at preſent, my preſent advantages and opportunities? what is my preſent duty? what are the events of the preſent time? finally, what is the beſt way to make myſelf as happy as I can be for the preſent? theſe things are little heeded by moſt perſons; and by none leſs, than by thoſe whoſe heads and hearts are crouded with

with cares and fears about *to morrow*.—How ſhould ſuch have a due ſenſe of God's mercies to them? like perſons who are amuſing themſelves with ſomething at a great diſtance from them, and take no notice of the objects which are neareſt; ſo do they fare. God *paſſeth by them* in the tokens of his favour, and *they ſee him not*; ſurrounds them with his preſence and protection, and they obſerve him not: the greateſt benefits are received with little or no acknowledgement, and the bounties of Providence, and the riches of divine Grace, as it were caſt away upon them.—Many advantages and opportunities occur, but not being attended to, paſs unimproved. And muſt not this be a *criminal* thoughtfulneſs for *the morrow* which hath ſuch an ill effect? all the inſtructions and helps with which the circumſtances of theſe perſons furniſh them, are in vain, for want of being regarded. Mercies are to them no mercies, and advantages no advantages: they are preſent, and at hand, and that is enough to diſparage them. Not what they *are*, or have *now*, but what they *ſhall be*, or have *hereafter*, employs their enquiries; as if what is future could concern us any other way than upon ſuppoſition that it will once be preſent; ſince any good or evil that will never be preſent, is nothing to us. And is it not ſtrange then, that while we are ſo ſollicitous

licitous about what will, or rather, may be preſent ſome time or other hereafter, we ſhould be ſo utterly regardleſs of what is actually preſent? yet ſuch is the uſual folly of mankind, that they deſpiſe their preſent advantages and opportunities, and, without vouchſafing them a ſingle thought, or no more than they cannot help, are hurried away, by the activity of their tempers, into remote proſpects.—There is alſo what may be called the *duty of the day*; but who are they that apply themſelves to conſider and diſcharge it? alas! too few; and for this reaſon, among others, that they have not leiſure for it, their thoughts being ingaged by other things, and ſuch as do not belong to them. What is the duty *now* incumbent upon me? how ſhall I redeem, and fill up the *preſent* time? there are duties annexed to the condition and circumſtances I am in, and the relations ſubſiſting between me and God, and between me and my fellow-creatures: my principal care ought to be to perform them, and to perform them well; to which end, 'tis highly expedient that I ſhould have my thoughts about me, and be able, in ſome good meaſure, to command the motions of my own mind, without being carried to and fro by a giddy imagination. Were people more intent upon a faithful, diligent

ligent diſcharge of the duties before them, as they would have *leſs time*, ſo *leſs inclination* too for meddling out of their ſphere. And on the other hand, when they gratify this fooliſh humour of enquiring into what is to come, and trouble and diſquiet themſelves about it, they can be ſuppoſed to think but little of their preſent duty, and have but little heart and diſpoſition for the performance of it; they either totally neglect their duty, or perform it in the moſt ſlight and careleſs manner. Under this head alſo are they included, whom the apprehenſion of future evils and inconveniencies *diſcourage* and *hinder* from the practice of *preſent* duty. Thus faulty would the *Apoſtles* have been, if their apprehenſions of future want and ſufferings had deterred them from preaching the goſpel of Chriſt; and thus guilty alſo are they, whom imaginary fears of *future* want hinder from being charitable and beneficent, according to their preſent abilities.—What are the events of the preſent time? let them be what they will, the man whoſe heart is devoured with careful thoughts about *to morrow*, is not in a condition to remark and improve them: however worthy of obſervation, and what good uſe ſoever may be made of them, they are treated as trifles, in compariſon of thoſe which their imagi-

imaginations have provided for them hereafter. And is not this moſt unjuſtifiable folly? if we do not improve *preſent* events, are we likely to make a right application of *future?* no, but theſe too being the matter of our care, and the object of our thoughts, only or chiefly while they are *future*, will be uſeleſs when they come to be *preſent*. This is one characteriſtic or token of that *thoughtfulneſs for to morrow* which the text condemns, it renders us leſs careful to improve preſent events. Not that we are indifferent what theſe events are, and no way affected with thoſe which are moſt unpleaſing and grievous: no, we can complain faſt enough, and have our feeling, when we ſeem to have loſt our ſight, or diſcerning faculty, in a moral ſenſe: but I need not ſay that fretfulneſs and impatience under afflictive events is not the way to profit by them; I ſhall only obſerve, that none are more liable to this impatient behaviour under afflictions, than thoſe who are addicted to a vicious curioſity about the future; as their minds, being tired out with ranging up and down in future time, are not ſo well capable of ſupporting any trouble or calamity, ſo they are vexed with any preſent ſuffering, becauſe it hinders them from employing their thoughts as they uſe to do. To which we may

may add, that they have not thoſe conſolatory arguments preſent to their minds for a time of trial, which are neceſſary to enable them to behave with chriſtian patience and calmneſs under it.—How ſhall we enjoy the preſent? how be as happy as our preſent circumſtances will admit? this is a very important queſtion with every wiſe man. 'Tis prudent advice [u] *to enjoy the good of all our labours*, and to paſs our days as agreeably as is conſiſtent with the rules of our holy religion: and I will be bold to ſay, that our religion is an enemy to no true and reaſonable joy; it by no means obliges us to renounce the innocent comforts of life, and to baniſh all gladneſs from our hearts; they greatly injure religion who ſo repreſent it. But if religion be not inconſiſtent with our happineſs, there is *a thoughtfulneſs for the morrow*, which is: "Hereafter I will ſit "down and enjoy myſelf, and the good "things which God has given me, if events "correſpond to my expectations, which I "fear they will not." And why not immediately? why ſhould I ſuffer myſelf to be robbed of any part of that happineſs and contentment which God has put it into my power to enjoy? why part with preſent peace and ſatisfaction, when life is ſo ſhort, and

[u] Eccleſ. v. 18.

and I ſhall never know what happineſs and ſelf-enjoyment means, if I let the preſent ſeaſon always eſcape me? The conduct of the covetous man, under the dreadful apprehenſion of want and poverty, is a lively repreſentation of the folly of all thoſe who take this forbidden *thought for the morrow.* The *miſer*, leſt he ſhould live to want what is neceſſary and convenient, condemns himſelf to a condition as miſerable as that of which he is ſo much afraid; for he could ſuffer no more than the want of conveniences, if he was too poor to procure them; and he wants theſe, when he is very well able to procure them. So the man eaten out with any other ſort of care and fear about the time to come, is by that means deprived of the comfort and pleaſure which the preſent moment offers him.—This is the *ſecond* inſtance under the *fourth* head; our *thought about the morrow* is then *exceſſive*, when it is the occaſion of our loſing the preſent time, not obſerving the mercies, nor improving the opportunities and events, nor diſcharging the duties, nor enjoying the comfort belonging to it.

3. OUT of an immoderate *thoughtfulneſs for the morrow*, or the future part of this life, perſons neglect the things of their everlaſting peace; or at beſt are much leſs mindful

mindful of them than they ought to be.—*Future time* is ſo much upon our thoughts, that *eternity* can hardly find any admiſſion there. Did men *ſeek firſt the kingdom of heaven*, and had they *their treaſure* and *their hearts above*, ſo as, comparatively ſpeaking, to have no other care, they would be under little temptation to run into the error againſt which our Savious cautions us. But, unhappily, their minds are pre-ingaged, and prepoſſeſt by a ſollicitude for this ſhort life, and the poſſible events of it; by which means they behave with regard to their everlaſting ſtate, as if there was no ſuch thing. Let men look into futurity if they will, provided they do not ſtop ſhort, and confine their proſpects to this preſent tranſitory life. Here they could not eaſily be guilty of exceſs. The thing is of infinite importance to them, and the more they thought of the next life, and the more care they took to qualify themſelves for it, the better would they live now, more comfortably in themſelves, and more uſefully to others: whereas *anxiety for the morrow*, by leſſening their concern for eternity, is an unſpeakable prejudice to them, makes them act contrary to the command of their Saviour, and to the reaſon and nature of things, ſo as to appear in the guiſe and character

character of the men of this world, more than like the diſciples of Chriſt.

III. THE next thing in order is to inquire into the reaſons of this prohibition, and this I ſhall do in my next diſcourſe.

SER-

SERMON III.

REASONS againſt immoderate thoughtfulneſs for the morrow.

MATT. vi. 34.

Therefore take no thought for the morrow; for the morrow ſhall take thought for the things of itſelf; ſufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

IN treating theſe words I

I. LAID down the following Propoſitions in order to give you a clearer and larger view of the ſubject.—The mind of man is ſtrangely unconfined in it's thoughts and operations—is actuated with a deſire of immortality—has a natural propenſion or curioſity to look into the future events of this

life—and, by its prudence and care, is capable of making ſome proviſion for the more comfortable and uſeful paſſing of the time allotted us here below. Having conſidered theſe Propoſitions, I

II. PROCEEDED to explain, in ſome particulars, the *fault* here forbidden by our Saviour. Then are we guilty of this forbidden *thoughtfulneſs for the morrow*, when the mind is too full of theſe thoughts—when they are attended with a reſtleſs anxiety and ſollicitude—when the mind is hindred from paying that regard to Providence, in reference to future events, which it ought—forgets what is paſt—loſes the preſent—and too much neglects the things of its everlaſting peace.

IT remains, that in purſuance of the method propoſed

III. I INQUIRE into the reaſons of this prohibition, and

IV. CONSIDER that courſe, which the *wiſdom from above* directs us to take in reference to futurity: of each of theſe in their order. Let us now therefore

III. INQUIRE into the reaſons of this prohibition. Why would not our bleſſed Saviour have his followers take any *thought for the morrow*, in the ſenſe before explained?

ed? he himſelf immediately ſubjoins *two* reaſons of this in the text, and others may be collected from the verſes preceeding, and from the whole current of ſcripture, as well as from the conſideration of the thing itſelf. I would take leave to obſerve by the way, that our divine Maſter, not only in giving this particular precept, but with regard to many other precepts contained in this excellent ſermon of his from the mount, (to go no farther) adds one or more conſiderations to ſhow the *reaſonableneſs* of his laws; that is, the intrinſic good or evil, the amiable and beneficial, or odious and hurtful nature of the things commanded or forbidden by him. And ſurely then, it can be no way improper in the *miniſters* of the goſpel, no diſſervice to our holy religion, no reproach to the author of it, but a mark of honour and reſpect to both, to enlarge upon theſe *reaſons* which Chriſt, perhaps, has little more than mentioned; or to offer others, if they are of weight and importance, and likely to ſet the truth in a clearer light, and to ſtrengthen the conviction of their duty in the minds of our hearers.

LET us then briefly conſider the reaſons of this prohibition; in doing which I ſhall take particular notice of thoſe *two* which the text ſuggeſts to us; That *the morrow ſhall take thought for the things of itſelf*;

and that *ſufficient for every day is the evil thereof.*

1. THIS forbidden *thoughtfulneſs for the morrow* is a direct affront to God, diſcovering, if not a total want of faith, yet the great weakneſs of it. Our Saviour therefore reproaches the perſons guilty of this ſin with the ſmalneſs of their faith; *O ye of little faith!* ver. 30. And certainly their religious belief muſt be very imperfect, who are overrun with cares about the things of this life, *what they ſhall eat and drink, and wherewithal they ſhall be clothed; and what ſhall be on the morrow.* What ſhall be on the morrow? why, what God pleaſes; for he governs the world, and, of his wiſe and good pleaſure, either *orders*, or, for the bringing about the deſigns of his Providence, *permits* every thing which comes to paſs in it. But now the language of theſe anxious thoughts about future events is, does *God know*, and *regard*, and *direct* human affairs? we ſeem to diſbelieve, or not believe ſo firmly as we ſhould the divine Providence, or not to have very worthy thoughts of it, or not to place our truſt and confidence in it; all which things are diſhonourable to God. —Without all reaſonable doubt, there is a Providence which takes care of man, and this care is proportionably greater than of other things, as man ſurpaſſes them in worth and dignity,

dignity, as our Saviour argues in a few verſes before the text. Is God our Maker? it then follows that he is our Preſerver; Creation and Providence being inſeperably linked together; and therefore we may conclude, that if God has made this body, and given us this life, he will provide for ſupporting both, on condition we do our part. God has made proviſion for inferior creatures, and will not therefore neglect thoſe who are more excellent. Do we ſtedfaſtly believe this, and ſeriouſly conſider it, when we act after much the ſame manner as we might be ſuppoſed to do, if the world was without an Overſeer, and Guardian, and Governor?—Or while we acknowledge the univerſal Providence of God, can our apprehenſions of it be ſo worthy and honourable as they ought to be, when we make no diſcovery of ſuch apprehenſions; but rather the contrary, in the manner of our being affected with the changes which do, or may befal us in the preſent life; do we believe the Providence of God to be moſt wiſe, powerful, and good? in this caſe we do not behave as if we did; for if there be an all-wiſe Providence, then things are and will be managed in the beſt manner they can be, infinitely better than we poor ſhort-ſighted creatures could pretend to manage them, if we were to have the direction: and why then does not this

ſatisfy us? the higher notions we have of the wiſdom of God, and the lower our notions are of our own wiſdom, muſt we not be leſs apt to lean to our own, and more inclined to acquieſce with a perfect reſignation of ſoul in that wiſdom which is ſupreme and infinite? If divine Providence be moſt powerful and good, then, amidſt the greateſt uncertainty of future events, 'tis moſt certain that it is not becauſe he is unable or unwilling to beſtow the good we deſire, or to prevent the evil we fear, that God does not beſtow the one, or prevent the other, but becauſe it is not expedient; and conſequently, that if it be expedient, he will order things ſo as we ourſelves ſhall wiſh. Let us [a] *delight ourſelves in the Lord, and he will give us the deſires of our hearts*; with this only proviſo, that what we deſire is really for our good: for he is kind to all, and moſt of all then to thoſe who love him, and put their truſt in him.—But alas! 'tis too plain a ſight that we do not [b] *truſt in the Lord with all our hearts*, as often as we are devoured with careful thoughts about future events: and what is this but a high offence and indignity to that God who ſo often commands, invites, and encourages us in his word to truſt in him? does he command, and ſhall not we obey? does

[a] Pſal. xxxvii. 4. [b] Prov. iii. 5.

does he invite, and ſhall we refuſe his invitation? does he encourage us to truſt in him, and ſhall we not be thankful for it as a very great advantage, and readily do what he encourages us to do? But it may be we are afraid we have no intereſt in God, no title to the care and direction of his Providence; why ſo? do we live in a courſe of ſin and rebellion againſt him? if this be the caſe, 'tis certain we have very little ground of confidence towards God; but as this is our own inexcuſable fault, that we are in ſuch a ſtate of enmity againſt God, and eſtrangement from him, it can be no excuſe for the neglect of other duties, which ſuppoſe us to be in a ſtate of friendſhip with him: on the contrary, the neglect of thoſe duties, which is the conſequence of a ſtate of ſin, only tends to aggravate the guilt of ſuch a ſtate.

2. THIS immoderate *thoughtfulneſs for the morrow* is, in a peculiar manner, unbecoming the profeſſors of the goſpel, who have the knowledge of the true God, and of the true happineſs of man, and the infallible way to it. [c] *After theſe things*, ſaith our bleſſed Maſter, *do the Gentiles ſeek*; the *Gentiles* who do not belong to the church of God, and are, by conſequence, deſtitute of the privileges of thoſe who live within

[c] Matth. vi. 32.

the bounds of this ſacred incloſure.—God is our Father, our heavenly Father, ſo he is here called, and under this name and title we are, in this chapter, directed to pray to him. [d] *Our Father, who art in heaven. Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of theſe things.* And cannot children be ſecure under the tuition of an indulgent Father, that he will not be wanting to them in any thing he can do for them, and apprehends to conduce to their real welfare and happineſs? now God is our *Father*, which ſpeaks *affection*; our *heavenly Father*, which ſignifies *power* and *dominion*. Our *Father* is *almighty*, and *all-ſufficient*, *knoweth all things*, and *can do all things*.—The particular Providence of God over good men is ſet in a clearer light by the goſpel, which teaches us, that [e] *the very hairs of our heads are all numbred*; and that [f] *not one of them ſhall periſh*; i. e. not the leaſt of their concernments are overlooked by God, nor will he ſuffer any, even the leaſt evil (abſolutely and finally ſuch) to befal them in the way of their duty. And what then have they to fear? —The goſpel has made the cleareſt diſcovery of an everlaſting world, and of a ſtate of conſummate happineſs reſerved for good men there. The goſpel ſtate now, and

[d] Matth. vi. 9, 32. [e] Matth. x. 30. [f] Luke xxi. 18.

and the ſtate of glory hereafter, are both called by the common name of the *kingdom of heaven*, to ſignify that one of them is only an introduction to, and preparation for the other: and when our Saviour tells his diſciples, that if [g] *they ſeek firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs, all other things ſhall be added to them*; he does, in effect, mind them, that all other things were but mere trifles in point of real weight and value, when compared to thoſe ſpiritual and eternal bleſſings with which God has bleſt us, and is ready ſtill further to bleſs us in Jeſus Chriſt; and therefore, that it cannot be ſuppoſed they ſhould be withheld from the true diſciples of Chriſt, by that overflowing bounty and goodneſs which beſtows a kingdom, a glorious, and everlaſting kingdom upon them. They therefore diſgrace their chriſtian profeſſion who are extremely ſollicitous about any thing in this life; 'tis not really worth it; the things are not of importance ſufficient to juſtify it, not in themſelves conſidered, and much leſs when taken together with heavenly and eternal things. Now the ſcandal which any temper or action brings to their profeſſion, its abſolute inconſiſtency with the ſpecial privileges and enjoyments of the goſpel, is a very good reaſon why all chriſtians, who regard

[g] Matt. vi. 33.

gard the honour of their religion, ſhould carefully avoid it, and will be judged and confeſt to be ſo by all ſuch.

3. ANOTHER ground of the prohibition is the utter unprofitableneſs of this anxious ſollicitude about future times and events. Our Saviour therefore aſks, ver. 27. *Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his ſtature?* intimating that events are no more ſubject to our command, or foreſight, than it is in our choice to be of what ſtature we pleaſe. All that is above a *prudent* care, all anxiety and inquietude of mind, can have no influence at all, or no good influence upon the train of events. Let us have a thouſand thoughts running in our heads, and turn things on every ſide, to what purpoſe is all this inward hurry? can it affect the outward courſe of things, or alter the decrees of Providence, which, after all, determines the iſſue? or with all our prying can we look into the womb of futurity, and know what will come up in the order of occurrences? There is certainly ſuch a thing as a dependence of events one upon another, and upon the actions of mankind. From ſuch a thing's being done or left undone a certain event follows, and from that another, by a ſort of chain, which God has in his hand, and of which he does not ordinarily ſee fit to interrupt and break the links;

links; ſo that if we could certainly foreſee the iſſue of every action, both immediate and remote, we might by that means, give a different turn to things in many inſtances: but we have no ſuch gift of foreſight as this; the mind of man does not ſeem capable of having this knowledge inherent in itſelf, and God does not ſee fit to communicate it to us in the way of extraordinary revelation. And foraſmuch as this is the caſe, 'tis in vain to ſtrive againſt the nature of things, and the will of God, ſince the utmoſt efforts of our minds will not avail any thing, nor all our care mend the matter.

4. ANOTHER reaſon of this prohibition may be taken from the miſchievous influence of the thing forbidden. I have already ſhown you, that exceſſive thought and care about future time hinders the regular diſcharge of our duty, with regard to the paſt and preſent time, and our everlaſting ſtate; it muſt therefore be ſinful in itſelf, and extremely prejudicial to us, and upon that account is forbidden us. Whatever promotes the performance of our duty, is itſelf a duty; whatever is inconſiſtent with it, or indiſpoſes for it, is a fault. This, I doubt, is not ſo much conſidered as it ſhould be. We are not only to view things and actions in themſelves, but in their relation to other things

things and actions; ſo that if this or that thing (as *thoughtfulneſs* for inſtance) were ſuppoſed to be innocent as to its abſolute nature, yet, at the ſame time, ſuppoſing it to have a manifeſt tendency to diſable us for the duties incumbent on us, or to divert us from them, under this relative conſideration of it, it would become criminal. There is one remarkably bad effect of anxious enquiry into the events of things, which I barely hinted before; *i. e.* declining to do our duty out of fear of the conſequences which may attend it: we ſuppreſs the truth, abandon a good cauſe, or grow cold in it, and put on diſguiſes; we dare not follow conſcience fully, and act up to the laws of friendſhip and religion; ſtooping to do mean and diſhonourable, if not criminal things; and all, becauſe we are ſuſpicious of our ſuffering ſome inconveniency for it, not conſidering, that we ſhould reſolve to adhere to the cauſe of truth and religion, and to keep a good conſcience, in defiance of the moſt diſcouraging proſpects in this world; ſince the proſpect which the man of integrity has on the other ſide the grave, is always animating, and the more ſo, the greater hardſhips he undergoes for his ſtedfaſtneſs in that which is good in the preſent life.

5. *THE morrow ſhall take thought for the things of itſelf.* This is *one* of the *two*

reaſons mentioned by our Saviour in the text, the meaning of which is not very obvious. It may ſignify, that without any anxiety of ours, let us only be found in the way of our duty, proviſion will be made for *the morrow* by a higher hand; in alluſion, perhaps, to the command which the [h] *Iſraelites* had in the wilderneſs, when they gathered *Manna, not to leave any of it till the morning*; in which caſe it bred worms, and ſtunk; but to truſt the Providence of God for the ſupply of the next day, he having promis'd them that they ſhould not want. Now, tho' the parallel does not run ſo exactly, that we are not to lay up any thing in ſtore to ourſelves againſt the time to come, yet ſo far it holds good, that diſmiſſing all diſtracting cares about futurity, we are to truſt Providence with the event, as they did; and ſince God has given us his word, that [i] *he will care for us*, and, as it were, *take thought for the things of to morrow*, it is a very ſolid reaſon why we ſhould *be careful for nothing*, in the ſenſe here intended by our Saviour.

OR, by *the morrow taking thought for the things of itſelf*, may be underſtood, that future time will have enough to employ our thoughts and paſſions when it comes, and ſuch things too, as we cannot before-hand imagine; and therefore we ſhould have patience

[h] Exod. xvii. 19, 20. [i] 1 Pet. v. 7.

tience to ſtay till we ſee what events are ordained for us, as they come forward in their proper courſe, taking this for our comfort in the mean while, that tho' *the morrow* ſhall have its cares, yet they ſhall be ſuch as every prudent and good man ſhall be well able to ſtand under.

6. THE laſt ground of the prohibition I ſhall mention, is, *that ſufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.* Why therefore ſhould I increaſe the load of the *preſent* day, by taking this ſollicitous thought about *the morrow?* this, at beſt, is antedating evils and calamities, and crowding more into the preſent time, than falls to its ſhare. We may thank ourſelves for the bitterneſs of our cup, if we put ingredients into it which God never deſigned ſhould be there. God would not have us make ourſelves miſerable, and add to the unavoidable troubles of life; theſe he will enable us to bear, and ſo direct, as that they ſhall turn to our great advantage in the end; but he has made us no ſuch promiſe in reſpect of thoſe cares and troubles which are of our own creating; and therefore we ſhould take heed how we multiply our ſufferings without neceſſity, and, as it were, hunt up and down in future time for imaginary misfortunes; for ſuch they are as to the preſent time, tho' they ſhould come to paſs, ſince they can have no reality till they

they exiſt; and, perhaps, may be imaginary in this ſenſe alſo, that they may never have any being. With a great deal of reaſon are the cares of this world compared by our Saviour to [k] *thorns*, not only upon the account there mentioned, that *they ſpring up, and choke the word of God that it becometh unfruitful*, but likewiſe becauſe of the torture to which they put the mind. A thorn in the fleſh gives exquiſite pain, which would be increas'd beyond all ſufferance if the whole body was ſtuck with them; and ſhould we ſuppoſe a perſon in ſuch a condition, he would be too fit an emblem of one whoſe ſoul is full of cares and fears about the preſent life, which prick him to the heart, and create him unſpeakable trouble and anguiſh.

HAVING therefore had this prohibition of our Saviour explained, of *taking no thought for the morrow*, and ſeen ſome of the reaſons of it, which muſt convince every conſidering perſon, that our duty and intereſt, our pleaſing God, and being pleaſed with ourſelves, are equally concerned herein; let us, my friends, reſolve to be more upon our guard againſt this common error, and to act, in this matter, as becometh reaſonable creatures, and the diſciples of Jeſus Chriſt; which brings me to the laſt thing in order, IV. To

[k] Matt. xiii. 22.

IV. To conſider the courſe which the *wiſdom that is from above* directs us to take in reference to futurity.—Here let me mention the following particulars, which I do not pretend to be all that may be named, but theſe I hope may be ſufficient (thro' the grace of God exciting us to, and bleſſing our ſerious conſideration) to confirm us in our good reſolutions, and, in ſome meaſure, to anſwer the end deſigned by them.

1. LET us begin with governing well our paſſions and affections, not permitting them to ſettle upon improper objects, or to run to an immoderate height. 'Tis no wonder when our affections are miſplaced, and violent, when we make a great many things eſſential to our quiet, and neceſſary parts of our happineſs, which are not ſo; 'tis no wonder if with our paſſions our cares too increaſe, and we are troubled beyond meaſure, and without end, about thoſe things which are the objects of our dotage; whether we ſhall have them or not, whether they ſhall be continued to us or not. One immoderate paſſion is fruitful of others; immoderate love to the enjoyments of this life, of whatever kind they be, produce immoderate fear, leſt we ſhould miſs of them, and loſe them; and immoderate cares when warding againſt the dreaded calamity: whereas,

whereas, did our hearts beat with that temperate and equal motion they ought towards thoſe things, as things we may be without, and which in ſome caſes, may be even hurtful to us, we ſhould be much better able to leave it to Providence to determine as it ſaw beſt, not ſollicitous before the event, nor diſcontented, or inconſolable afterwards.

2. LET us not neglect the gift of *natural* prudence which is in us; and farther, let us labour to improve and add to it by *acquired.* There are principles of prudence with which all perſons of common capacity are furniſhed, and as it is not impoſſible for them to cultivate them, and, by frequent reflection and conſideration, to become poſſeſt of a habit of prudence in ſome good degree; as this is not impoſſible to be done, ſo 'tis every man's duty and intereſt to do it, that he may diſcharge his whole duty in a more ſteddy, uſeful manner, and paſs life with more credit, and with more tranquility. The exerciſe of prudence will have theſe *two* or *three* good effects, among others; that we ſhall not trouble ourſelves about *unlikely* things, where things are *likely* to happen; ſhall uſe the beſt methods for the accompliſhment of our deſires; and finally, that we ſhall know better how to make allowance for the *uncertainty* of all

human events; which *three* rules well obſerved, would cut off the occaſion of a great part of that uneaſineſs under which the generality of mankind perpetually labour.—If we are prudent, we ſhall not trouble ourſelves about things very *unlikely* to happen; we ſhall not form projects and deſigns which have little or no foundation; we ſhall not meddle with things too high for us; ſhall not, on the one hand, flatter, or, on the other, fright ourſelves with the probability of events which are not at all probable. And how much would the good obſervation of this ſingle rule reduce our cares? —And farther, if prudent, where there is likelihood of an event, we ſhall order the means conducting to the accompliſhment of our deſire in the moſt regular manner, and purſue them with conſtancy and calmneſs; not expecting to reap if we do not ſow, nor to ſucceed when we do not take the right method for it. Our diſappointments will ſit the lighter upon us, not being the effect of our own inexcuſable negligence and folly.—And, which ſhews yet more plainly the great uſefulneſs of this virtue of prudence, it will teach us to make allowance for the *uncertainty* of all human things. Is the event uncertain? the prudent man conſiders it, and therefore does not depend upon it. The uncertain nature of

theſe

theſe things makes him value them the leſs, and not indulge to exceſs, either his hopes or his fears about them. Such would be the uſe of prudence, joined with piety, which is a ſufficient reaſon and encouragement for exerciſing, and by exerciſe, improving it; I ſay *prudence* joined with *piety*, for

3. We ſhould by humble prayer, and a religious truſt, commit ourſelves, and all our concernments into the hand of God. We ſhould entreat him to take the charge of us, and ours, and of all for whom we are concerned; and ſo to order and diſpoſe of them as ſhall ſeem meet to his infinite wiſdom, joined with equal goodneſs. This is the Apoſtle *Paul*'s direction, [l] *Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and ſupplication with thankſgiving, make your requeſt known unto God:* μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε, *be thoughtful for nothing.* So that prayer is an univerſal remedy, a remedy againſt all ſollicitous cares. Be *ſollicitouſly careful* for nothing, or *thoughtful* for nothing. Being intent upon doing my duty, I ſhould leave events with God, to whom they belong. Did we piouſly look to God in prayer, [m] *caſting all our care upon him* (the ſame word again, as for *taking thought*, in the text) *who careth for us*; did we labour to poſſeſs our minds with a diſtincter appre-

 henſion,

[l] Phil. iv. 6. [m] 1 Pet. v. 7.

henſion, and firmer belief of his good Providence, and to bring our wills into a more intire conformity and reſignation to all its determinations, we ſhould, at once, eaſe ourſelves of the chief temptations to *thoughtfulneſs for the morrow*: being able to ſay from the heart, *thy will be done*, we ſhould, without impatience or diſturbance, wait the unfolding of events, knowing that whatever they happened to be, they would be according to the will of God. To add no more,

4. LET us, in ſome ſenſe, reduce our *many* cares into *one*; even this, the care of *pleaſing God*, and finiſhing the work which he has given us to do. This ſhould give law to every other care; and then all our other cares, being ſubordinated to this, would not ſo much diſquiet us. "How ſhall I "acquit myſelf well in the ſight of God, "ſo as to obtain his approbation and favour? "how ſhall I glorify God? how redeem "my time, and fill it up to the beſt ad-"vantage? how improve the talents com-"mitted to my truſt in ſuch a manner, that "I may have confidence before my Lord "at his coming? how adorn the goſpel, "keep myſelf unſpotted from the world, "and, in all the relations and circumſtances "of life, maintain a character for piety, cha-"rity, diſintereſtedneſs, and integrity? how "may I paſs life moſt uſefully, and meet "death

" death moſt ſafely and comfortably ? " Having my mind and heart poſſeſs'd with ſuch thoughts as theſe, every other thought inconſiſtent with theſe would be excluded ; and, for the joy that was ſet before me, I ſhould ſo regard temporal things, as to be eaſy and ſatisfied, whatever, thro' the wiſe appointment of God, either did, or might happen to me in this world.

SERMON IV.

Of the nature, pleaſures, and advantage of devotion.

PSALM lxxiii. 28.

It is good for me to draw near to God.

THE people of *Iſrael*, to whom the *Pſalmiſt* belong'd, was ſurrounded with idolaters; this is the reaſon that we meet with ſo many paſſages which have relation to idolatry in the book of *Pſalms*. The words of the text are of this kind; for, in oppoſition to the worſhippers of idols, or falſe gods, of whom he ſaith in the former verſe, *Lo, they that are far from thee ſhall periſh; thou haſt deſtroyed all them that go a whoring from thee*; the *Pſalmiſt* declares for himſelf, *It is good for me to draw near to God.* "It is my reſolution to continue ſted-"faſt in the worſhip and ſervice of the true "God,

" God, the Maker of the univerſe, who " hath choſen us to be his peculiar people ; " and, in doing this, I reckon I moſt ef- " fectually conſult my own happineſs, " both preſent and future, temporal and e- " ternal." Taking the words out of this view, as oppoſing the worſhip of the true God to that of idols, I ſhall treat of them in a greater latitude, as recommending the practice of piety and devotion ; accordingly I ſhall make the following obſervation the ſubject of *two* Diſcourſes, *That a devout approach to God in the duties and exerciſes of divine worſhip is attended with great pleaſure and advantage to the ſoul.*—This Propoſition I ſhall endeavour to prove and illuſtrate by applying myſelf,

I. To the conſideration of devotion in general, and

II. OF the particular duties of it, *viz.* prayer, ſinging the praiſes of God, reading and hearing his word, meditation, and the holy communion.

I. I SHALL endeavour to illuſtrate and prove the truth of this Propoſition, *That a devout approach to God in the duties and exerciſes of divine worſhip, is attended with great pleaſure and advantage to the ſoul,* by conſi-

dering it in relation to devotion in general: and here I would

I. EXPLAIN the nature of this devout approach to God in the duties of his worſhip, and

II. REPRESENT the pleaſure and advantage of it.

I. I SHALL explain the nature of this devout approach to God in the duties of his worſhip; and this I ſhall do in ſome particulars. It implies the knowledge of God; a ſupreme love and affection to him; that we place ourſelves as in his immediate preſence; and finally, that we perform every duty we ingage in with a view of thereby glorifying God, of obtaining his favour, and of walking worthy of him at all other times.

1. THE knowledge of God is preſuppoſed to our devoutly approaching him in the duties of his worſhip. For how can we converſe with, how can we honour, how can we delight in a Being whom we do not know, or of whom we have very confuſed, or, which is worſe, falſe apprehenſions? if we have none, or very little knowledge of God, we ſhall worſhip God juſt as we do ſome other actions, becauſe we are accuſtomed to it, or in compliance with the faſhion, or to ſerve ſome ſecular purpoſe; we

ſhall

ſhall perform the external part of the action, without having any notion of the nature and end of it; much after the ſame manner as the greater part of the *Jews*, in *Iſaiah*'s time, attended upon the worſhip of God; of whom the Prophet ſaith with ſome indignation, [a] *He that killeth an ox is as if he ſlew a man; he that ſacrificeth a lamb as if he cut off a dogs neck: he that offereth an oblation as if he offered ſwine's blood.* We ſhall ſpoil the duties we perform, ſo as not barely to loſe the benefit of them, but to turn them into an abomination, eſpecially if our notions of God are falſe and diſhonourable, as we may ſuppoſe thoſe of that people were, whom the *Prophet* reproves. They thought, [b] *that God was altogether ſuch a one as themſelves*, to be pleaſed with pomp, and ſhow, and complement; or like the gods of the *heathen*, who regarded not the hearts or manners of their worſhippers. And indeed, one of theſe is generally followed with the other, that is, ignorance with error, not knowing God, with having falſe conceptions of him; for 'tis ſeldom that perſons reſt in a bare negative. The belief of a God, a Being above them, to whoſe power they are ſubject, is natural to the minds of men; and believing ſuch a Being to exiſt, they are willing to have ſome notion of him, and uſually

[a] Iſai. lxvi. 3. [b] Pſal. l. 21.

uſually take up with that which will give them leaſt diſturbance in the purſuit of their luſts. Would we draw near to God, we muſt have other and better ideas of him. It greatly concerns us therefore to acquaint ourſelves with God, ſeriouſly and impartially to uſe our [c] *reaſon* in forming worthy conceptions of the divine excellencies, as diſcovered in the works and word of God; and to ſeaſon our minds with ſuch thoughts and apprehenſions, as will at once repreſent God to us in the moſt awful, and in the moſt amiable and ingaging light; not only as poſſeſſed of [d] *almighty power*, and *ſupreme dominion*, but of *infinite wiſdom*, and *equal goodneſs*; not only as *abundant* in *mercy*, of *tender compaſſions*, and *ready to forgive*, but as *righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works*; as a [e] *ſpirit* who *will be ſerved in ſpirit and in truth*, with *clean hands* and a *pure heart*; as a [f] *lover of mankind*, but a greater lover of *holineſs*; and, indeed, as expreſſing his love to his reaſonable creatures, by making them capable of holineſs, and obliging them to aſpire after it. God muſt appear clothed in all his perfections, ſo as to deſerve our adoration, our obedience, our delight, and hope, and imitation.

2. To

[c] Acts xvii. 24—8. [d] Dan. iv. 34, 5. Pſal. cxlv. 6—9, 17. cxlvii. 3—6. [e] John iv. 24. Pſal. xxiv. 4. [f] Tit. iii. 4. Iſai. xxvii. 11.

2. To the knowledge muſt be added the love of God, a ſincere, a prevailing, a ſupreme affection to him, in order to our approaching him in a devout and proper manner. Love is devotion, the eſſence, and the perfection of it; and in proportion, as our love is greater, our devotion is more intenſe. *Habitual* devotion is nothing elſe but the habit of divine love; as *actual* devotion conſiſts in the actual and explicit exerciſes of this heavenly affection. The union and converſation of intelligent Beings, ſuch as God, and the ſoul of man are, muſt be ſuitable to the nature of thoſe Beings; that is, of a moral and ſpiritual kind, or by knowledge and love, by the underſtanding, and the heart. The ſoul which loves God is near to him, and he neareſt who loves him moſt. The ſoul is attracted towards the ſupreme Being by its affections, theſe are the immediate ſprings of its motion, theſe lend it force and wings to fly. If we have not the love of God in our hearts, we ſhall think ourſelves happy enough at a diſtance from him; yea, then happieſt, when we are moſt undiſturbed by the thought of any ſuch Being, and leaſt awed by his preſence and authority; and ſhall lie grovelling on the earth unable to get out of the ſphere of its attraction: but if love to God be the ruling affection of our ſouls, the conſequence

ſequence will be that we ſhall never think ourſelves nigh enough to him; love will bring us near to him, and be perpetually prompting us to draw ſtill nearer. The meaning of which is, the greater our love, the more ardent will our wiſhes and endeavours be that it were ſtill greater; we ſhall feed and cheriſh the heavenly flame, heedfully avoid whatſoever tends to damp it, and approve and delight in ourſelves, in the ſame proportion as we delight in God.

3. WHEN we *draw near to God*, we place ourſelves as in his immediate preſence. —There is no ſuch thing as a *local* diſtance between God and any of his creatures, for he is every where preſent: this is an eſſential perfection of his nature; and we might as well exclude him from *all* places as from *any* one. But what if God ſurrounds me with his preſence, as long as I do not think of him as preſent with me, it is in that reſpect the ſame as if he was abſent from me. The preſence of God has its proper effects upon us by the mediation of our thoughts; then we ſtand in awe of him, and pay him the homage due to his ſupreme excellencies; then our ſouls aſcend to him, and long for him, and pour out their deſires before him; when we conſider him as near to us, as penetrating our very Beings, ſuſtaining all their powers and faculties, and ac-

acquainted with every motion of our minds: for the preſence of God is not like that of an unintelligent Being, which is ſo preſent with other things as not to know it; or like the preſence of a blind and deaf man in company, which is no more to him than if he was in a remote ſolitude. *Omnipreſence* in God is connected with *Omniſcience*; being every where, he beholds what is done every where; being preſent with the mind, he knows perfectly well all its thoughts, and deſires, and affections. This the devout ſoul apprehends and believes, and accordingly ſummons itſelf to appear before God; ſtands as a ſacrifice at his altar, or as a perſon to be tried before his tribunal, or falls proſtrate as a ſupplicant before his throne. Nor is this all; the devout worſhipper not only conſiders himſelf as in the preſence of God, but as in his *ſpecial* and *more immediate* preſence. Something more is implied in the preſence of God with good men, than with thoſe of another character; and with good men themſelves, when they draw near to him in the ſolemnities of his worſhip, than at other times. Indeed there is no time or place in which God is not [g] *nigh to them who fear him; he compaſſeth their path, and their lying down, and is acquainted with all their ways:* he is preſent with them as their guide,

[g] Pſal. cxlv. 18, 19. cxxxix. 3.

guide, and guardian, and helper; and as there is no time when they may not raiſe their minds to God in occaſional ejaculations, they do by ſuch thoughts make him preſent with them in a ſtill more proper ſenſe: but then do they *draw near to God* in a peculiar and diſtinguiſhing ſenſe, when they approach him in the duties of worſhip, retreat from all the cares, and amuſements, and pleaſures of life, baniſh every other object from their minds, and give themſelves intirely to the exerciſes of devotion; they now regard theſe as their proper, their only buſineſs, and remember that God alone is he with whom they have now to do. We have no ſuch viſible ſymbol or token of the divine preſence in our aſſemblies, or other places, and times of devotion, as there was ordinarily in the *Jewiſh* ſanctuary; but however, God is *peculiarly*, tho' not *viſibly* preſent whereſoever he is devoutly worſhipped; and his devout worſhippers do conſider themſelves as in this *peculiar* and *immediate* preſence, in which they are to behave after another manner than they are allowed to do in their common converſation, confining the attention of their minds intirely to the work they are about: and herein does chiefly conſiſt the ſpecial nature of this preſence, that we are employed in the immediate ſervice of God, and

and wait upon him with a ſuitable ſolemnity and ſerioufneſs of ſpirit.

4. *Drawing near to God*, or devoutly approaching him in the duties of his worſhip, implies, that we perform every duty with an aim to glorify God thereby; a deſire to obtain his favour and acceptance; and a reſolution to walk worthy of God; and the freedom of intercourſe we have with him at other times.

1. THE devout worſhipper performs every duty with an aim thereby to glorify God: this is what the Lord ſpake by *Moſes*, ſaying, [h] *I will be ſanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified.* The primary intention of all worſhip is doing ſomething to the honour of God; ſuch are our obligations to this beſt of Beings, that [i] *whether we eat or drink, or whatever elſe we do*, we are commanded *to do all to his glory*; and as this holds in all our actions, ſo more eſpecially in thoſe of a religious nature. In the common actions of life we glorify God by a general dedication of ourſelves, and all we do, to his glory; never doing any thing inconſiſtent with the glory of God; and as we have opportunity and ability for it, acting in a way more directly ſuitable to our character of reaſonable creatures and chriſtians: but our religious actions

[h] Levit. x. 3. [i] 1 Cor. x. 31.

actions are, in their own nature, more immediately referred to God, and we are so to refer them, considering God both as their immediate *object* and *end*; and by all we do, designing to magnify his name, to express our submissive regard to his authority, and wishing he may be honoured and served more worthily by us, and by all intelligent Beings in all parts of the creation.

2. THEN do we *draw near to God*, when we perform every duty with a desire to obtain his favour; [k] *his favour in which there is life, and his loving kindness which is better than life.* We do not only say, but think so; and this is our principal inducement with regard to ourselves in coming before God, that which enlivens our devotions, and makes us prefer the hours of religious converse with our Maker before all other, that we hope for his acceptance in what we do. "May I but please God, and find favour "in his sight, and I am satisfied. *Lord, lift* "*up the light of thy countenance upon me!* "I desire no greater, no other reward for "serving God, but God himself. Here is "the sum, the terminating point of my "wishes, that I may so worship God, as to "have his approbation and love. The thing "I am sollicitous for is not to please men, "but God: [l] *this one thing have I desired* "*of*

[k] Psal. xxx. 5. [l] Psal. xxvii. 4.

" *of the Lord, and that will I ſeek after*;
" and I ſhall eſteem myſelf a thouſand times
" happier than thoſe whom they call the
" darlings of fortune, the favourites of the
" moſt powerful princes, thoſe who pur-
" ſue honours, and riches, and pleaſures of
" the world with the greateſt ardour and
" ſucceſs, if I may but have my deſire in
" this one thing crowned with enjoy-
" ment."

3. WE *draw nigh to God* in any duty, when we perform that duty with a reſolution to walk worthy of God, and the freedom of intercourſe we have with him, at other times. 'Tis a very great honour this, that God will be approached by us; and by approaching him in religious duties, we lay ourſelves under the ſtricteſt obligations to frame our whole lives by the principles of religion and virtue; for only by ſo doing ſhall we act ſuitably to our privileges and our obligations. And is this what we ſincerely and firmly purpoſe in diſcharging the duties of devotion, to ingage ourſelves hereby to the more active, the more faithful, and the more conſtant performance of all the duties incumbent upon us in the courſe of our lives? do we *draw near to God* in acts of devotion, to the intent we may be able to keep near to him in our general converſation? and do we reſolve that we will?

that we will endeavour to live over every duty, if the expression may be allowed; and hope and fear, rejoice and grieve, converse and act, and manage all the affairs of life, as those whose [m] *fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ?* then may we be truly said to *draw near to God.* So should we *draw near to God* in the duties of every *Sabbath*, for this is the day of our solemn assemblies; and when we partake of the *Lord's-Supper*, there is an additional reason for our care, lest while we appear one to the other to *draw near to God*, our hearts be far from him; and instead of making our condition better, we make it worse than it was before. Have we the knowledge of this mystery of God in Christ? *i. e.* of the revelation which God has made of himself in the gospel, and of the method he has taken for the restoring mankind to his image and favour, to holiness and happiness? do we understand the nature and design of divine worship in general, and of the several parts of it, particularly of the holy institution, the *Lord's-Supper?* do we know and consider the intent of it to be a solemn and affecting remembrance of Christ, especially as dying for us, in order to ingage us to imitate him, to obey him, and to put our trust in him? do we feel our hearts burn

[m] 1 John i. 3.

burn within us with the power of divine love; love to God, and love to our Saviour, while we are celebrating the love of both in these sacred memorials of it? do we set ourselves as in the *immediate presence* of God, and at the *Table* of our Lord; and by a lively faith represent to ourselves an unseen Redeemer seated on the throne of his glory, and encircled with hosts of angels? is it our sincere aim to give honour to God, and to the Lamb, by eating bread and drinking wine in obedience to the command, and out of a grateful regard to the memory of our once dying, but now ever-living Lord? is it our earnest desire that the love of God, and of Jesus, may be shed abroad in our hearts, that we may have some good assurance of our being [n] *accepted in the beloved*; the thought of which gives us more satisfaction than any other prospect or enjoyment can do? and do we renew our resolutions of behaving at all times as the disciples of Christ, and those who [o] *through him have access by one Spirit to the Father?* not to dishonour our christian profession by an irregular and earthly conversation, but to adorn it by the practice of every virtue, and to give the world an example what manner of persons they are who are really acquainted with Christ, with the virtues of his life, the spi-

[n] Ephes. i. 6. [o] Ephes. ii. 18.

rit and genius of his religion, and the quickning influences of his love? and ſuitable to our reſolutions, when our hearts are enlarged by acts of devotion, are our endeavours and our conduct afterwards? we have then no reaſon to doubt of our *drawing near to God*; ſuch ſigns, and evidences, and effects of it can never deceive us.—Having thus repreſented the nature of this devout approach to God in the duties of his worſhip, the next thing I have to do, is

II. To ſhow the pleaſure and advantage of it. This may be eaſily apprehended, if we conſider the Being to whom we draw near; the [p] promiſe of God, that *if we draw nigh to him he will draw nigh to us*, and bleſs us; that devotion is one of the beſt exerciſes of the nobleſt powers of our natures; and finally, that theſe powers are hereby gradually raiſed to their perfection, and ſo prepared for the delightful performance of their proper functions, as occaſion offers.

1. LET us conſider the Being to whom we *draw near* in the exerciſes of devotion. We *draw near to* GOD; a name which includes in it every thing that is great and excellent, and moreover expreſſes his peculiar relation to us.

1. WE *draw near to God*, the moſt excellent of all Beings; the moſt excellent, becauſe

[p] James iv. 8.

becauſe he is the *firſt*, and, conſequently, independent of all others; and if he depends not upon any other for his Being, his Perfection, or Bleſſedneſs, then he muſt have a fulneſs of all this in himſelf. His glory, being originally and entirely from himſelf, and every perfection belonging to him, muſt be infinite; for what could limit him? This infinitely great and glorious Being do we worſhip, to him we *draw near*, with him we converſe, and muſt there not be ſomething highly exalting and animating in a free intercourſe with ſuch a Being? ſuch is the greatneſs of the object, and its tranſcendent beauty and excellence muſt give no little pleaſure to a mind capable of diſcerning it, and rightly diſpoſed to receive the pleaſure which ſuch an object is fitted to communicate. Man is a ſocial Being, he naturally loves ſociety, and flies ſolitude; perfect ſolitude is frightful to him. God, who beſt knew his own creature, ſaid [q] *It is not good for man to be alone.* And for the ſame reaſon that ſociety is neceſſary to happineſs, and many advantages reſult from it, the nobleſt ſociety to thoſe who are fitted for it, muſt afford the nobleſt delight, and the greateſt and moſt numerous advantages. And what other Being is there whom we can compare with God, or even liken to him? pro-

[q] Geneſ. ii. 18.

vided therefore there be any poſſibility of communication between this ſovereign Being and the ſoul of man, the ſoul having an original capacity for this communication, and by the renovation of the faculties being prepared and qualified for it, muſt have a ſatisfaction in it far tranſcending any of the delights of ſenſe: and foraſmuch as the ſoul is intelligent, what ſhould hinder its communication with the Deity, as an object tho' infinitely above it, yet, in other reſpects, wonderfully ſuited to it? I ſay, what ſhould hinder this, when the faculties of the ſoul are in their right order? in the ſame proportion as the ſoul gradually recovers its primitive rectitude, muſt it not receive an increaſing pleaſure from the intercourſe? eſpecially when we conſider

2. THAT there is the relation of *Creator* and *creature* between God and the ſoul of man; nay, not merely of *Creator* and *creature*, but of *parent* and *offſpring*. And are we not warranted to conclude, that he who is the original of intelligent Beings is their center too? that the fountain of their exiſtence is alſo the fountain of their bleſſedneſs? and does not every thing naturally tend to its center, and reſt there? ſuch a tendency is there in the ſoul of man towards God. Its actual direction may be to created good, being turned aſide by erroneous notions

tions in the mind, or by the violent inclinations of the animal and fleſhly part; but ſtill there is an internal weight, by which, if all impediments were removed, the ſoul would be immediately and inceſſantly carried towards God as its chief good; and under all the impediments that can be ſuppoſed, and when the ſoul ſeems to have no inclination but to other objects, this *natural gravitation* towards the center of its Being will cauſe a perpetual reſtleſsneſs within, and prevent its being ever truly happy, till it returns to God from whom it wandered: and no ſooner has it done this, and is entered into a devotional acquaintance with God, which it endeavours to maintain by the regular performance of the duties of divine worſhip, but it has a ſatisfaction and pleaſure which aſſure it of its being now got into the right way.

2. THERE muſt be great pleaſure and advantage in a devout approach to God, becauſe he has promiſed, that *he will draw nigh to them, who draw nigh to him.* This is the expreſs language of ſcripture; and we can never think that the thing here promiſed is a matter of trifling importance; or that God has promiſed any thing which he will not perform. There is ſomething in the very idea of *God's being near to us*, which fills the mind with joy and confi-

dence; for what leſs can be implied herein, than, in general, that the Almighty has taken us into a ſtate of friendſhip with himſelf, and that he will bleſs us with the effects and teſtimonies of that friendſhip? and our biggeſt wiſhes ſurely cannot extend farther than this. The favour of an Almighty, Omnipreſent Being is no ſmall privilege. He who is Almighty is [r] *able to do for us above all that we can aſk or think*; and his being *near* to us may ſatisfy us, that whatever he is able to do, in order to make us happy, he will do, in that degree and meaſure which is ſuitable to the circumſtances of a ſtate of trial now; and perfectly, or ſo as to anſwer our higheſt expectations at laſt. Particularly theſe *four* things, among others, are included in *God's drawing nigh to us, Protection, Illumination, Aſſiſtance,* and *Conſolation.*

1. THE firſt thing ſuggeſted by God's *drawing nigh to us* is *Protection*; that he will take us under the *ſhadow of his wings*, and guard us from all danger. Near to God we cannot but be ſafe; no evil can come nigh to him to whom the Lord is nigh; for all power belongeth unto God. He can divert evil when it is juſt impending, and turn another way the tempeſt which threatens to break upon our heads. What would we deſire more than to be encompaſs'd

[r] Epheſ. iii. 20.

paſs'd round with the divine preſence? with the *gracious* preſence of God I mean; for as to his *eſſential* preſence, it ſurrounds all alike. He can never be over-powered for he is Almighty; never be over-reached, for he is All-wiſe; never taken at unawares, for [f] *he that keepeth Iſrael does never ſlumber or ſleep.* [t] *His eyes are ever open upon the righteous*, and his Providence continually watchful for them; ſo that if he ſuffers any thing to befal them which has the appearance of an evil (as ſickneſs, or loſſes, or diſappointments) it is with a deſign of bringing ſome greater good out of it.

2. ANOTHER thing intended by *God's drawing nigh to us*, is *Illumination.* God will enlighten our path in the common conduct of life, giving us that wiſdom which is profitable to direct. We are invited, [u] *if we lack wiſdom to aſk it of him*, and we ſhall not aſk it in vain; he will make us wiſe to know the things that belong to our preſent, as well as future peace; make plain our way before us, and ſo guide us in judging, that we ſhall not be fatally deceived. This lower ſort of *Illumination* will be greatly valued by every one who conſiders in what an intricate labyrinth we are ingaged in our paſſage thro' this life, how apt to be deceived

[f] Pſal. cxxi. 4. [t] Pſal. xxxiv. 15. [u] James i. 5.

ceived with the appearances of things, and how prone to wander out of our way: in ſuch circumſtances, no one who has a right notion of his own caſe would refuſe a guide; and having ſuch a guide as God is, one who knows every ſtep of the way, and can give us light in the darkeſt ſeaſons, who is there that will not think himſelf very happy? but there is a diviner *Wiſdom* and a higher *Illumination* than this; I mean that which reſpects our everlaſting ſalvation. We need no other proof than what may be drawn from *reaſon*, of the poſſibility of this; or that God can irradiate the mind with heavenly knowledge and wiſdom. The *Scriptures* are an inexhauſtible treaſure of ſacred truth; nor muſt we imagine that God will communicate to us the knowledge of any truth which is not contained therein: this is not the meaning of this *inward Illumination*; but his ſhining in upon the devout ſoul, ſo as to enable it more clearly to diſcern thoſe truths, and to know them for its good. The *object* is already provided in the Word of God, and the *Spirit* of God can ſo influence the faculty, that the *object* ſhall appear in a ſtronger and fuller light: and on condition the ſoul [w] *follows on to know the Lord*, earneſtly deſirous of farther acquaintance with God in the diſcoveries which he

[w] Hoſ. vi. 3.

he hath made of himſelf to mankind, and while it [x] *ſearches the ſcriptures with all diligence*, humbly looking up to him for *illuminating grace*, there can be no reaſon to doubt that God will proſper the endeavours of ſuch an inquiring ſoul, and cauſe a day-ſtar to ariſe in the heart, the rays of which ſhall be extremely reviving. Can the Father of light be nigh to us in a way of favour, that immenſe Sun from whom all intellectual light is derived, and the ſoul continue in a ſtate of darkneſs? it cannot be. It ſhall have all that *Illumination* which is neceſſary for it, and what it has ſhall be unſpeakably refreſhing.

3. GOD's *drawing nigh to us* denotes *Aſſiſtance*. He will [y] *ſtrengthen us with all might in the inner man*. Not only diffuſe *light* over the mind, but infuſe *life* and *vigour* into it; by which the devout chriſtian ſhall be enabled to fulfil every duty, and to ſupport every burden. Can it be that when the ſoul by pious breathings *draws nigh to God*, and God in return ſhows the pleaſure he takes in ſuch a ſoul by *drawing nigh to it*; can it be thought that he does not ſecretly recruit the ſtrength, fortify the reſolution, and aid the endeavours of a poor creature ſo intirely devoted to him? there can be no doubt of it. But then you are to

[x] Acts xvii. 11. [y] Epheſ. iii. 16

to obſerve that this *inward ſtrength* is imparted in a *moral* way, that is, by the mediation of the underſtanding, and in the uſe of all proper means, particularly approaching to God conſtantly and devoutly in the duties of divine worſhip, and walking holily and circumſpectly afterwards. In this caſe, [z] *he giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaſeth ſtrength.* And where is the chriſtian, how weak ſoever in himſelf, who cannot [a] *do all things thro' Chriſt that ſtrengthens him?* that ſtrengthens him by his *Word* which has a quickening, animating power in it, and by his *Spirit?* what is ſaid of *Charity*, may, in a ſomewhat different ſenſe, be ſaid of ſuch a perſon, *that he beareth all things, and endureth all things.*

4. GOD's *drawing nigh* to the ſoul is attended with *Conſolation.* He can make the ſoul [b] *to abound in hope thro' the power of the Holy Ghoſt*; and *fill it with joy and peace in believing:* and he incourages us to expect no leſs, when he promiſes us *to draw nigh to us.* There is a *Conſolation* which accompanies every particular mentioned before, of divine *Protection*, *Illumination*, and *Aſſiſtance*; but 'tis not unlikely that the chriſtian has more joy than *naturally* and *neceſſarily*

[z] Iſai. xl. 29. [a] Philip. iv. 13. [b] Rom. xv. 13.

ſarily ſprings from theſe ſources, a joy, which tho' it is founded in reaſon, and accompanied with light and reflection, does immediately derive its original from an *influx* of God into the mind, which is not to be denied for no other reaſon than becauſe it cannot be explained; for who can diſtinctly explain the manner in which the ſoul operates upon the body, and much more of the operation of the ſupreme Being upon the ſoul? nothing more difficult than to conceive *how* this is done, nothing more eaſy than to comprehend, that it *muſt be*. That God has a power to influence the mind, and if to influence it in a way of *Illumination*, of *Conſolation* too; *one* is no more impoſſible, or inconceivable than the *other*: but then it muſt be remarked, that divine *Conſolations* are not blind obſcure *Senſations* of ſoul, and may be thereby diſtinguiſhed from thoſe agreeable *Emotions*, which are the pure effects of mechaniſm, or the livelineſs of corporeal nature. He that *rejoices in the Lord* can give a reaſon why he rejoices, his joy is never without a reaſonable foundation; what he knows of God, and of himſelf, will fully juſtify it, tho' it is not the intire or only cauſe of it. —This then is the *ſecond* conſideration, ſhowing the pleaſure and advantage of devout converſes with God, *viz.* his promiſe to *draw nigh*

nigh to us; in which, among other things, are comprehended *Protection*, *Illumination*, *Aſſiſtance*, and *Conſolation*.

3. *Devotion* is one of the beſt exerciſes of the nobleſt powers of our nature. The two nobleſt faculties belonging to our nature are the *Underſtanding* and the *Will*; and both theſe have the divineſt employment found them by devotion.

1. THE *Underſtanding* is the leading faculty, and that without which the other faculties would be of little uſe. 'Tis the *Underſtanding* which directs their exerciſe, and provides objects for them: and as to its own objects, the *Underſtanding* has a vaſt variety lying before it, among which there is one that excels all the reſt, and that is the *ever-bleſſed God*, who lighted up this intellectual lamp within us. By contemplation the *Underſtanding* converſes with this moſt glorious Being; and can there be a nobler or more excellent act of the human ſoul than contemplation, when thus directed? this act is the moſt perfect in its kind, tho' it be capable of being carried to greater perfection as to its degree, and will be ſo in a future ſtate, when the ſoul ſhall have a more immediate ſight of the ſupreme beauty, and a more elevated, tho' not a comprehenſive knowledge of the divine perfections. At preſent we are not ſo well ſituated for *divine*

divine Contemplation, but however, under all the diſadvantages of the preſent ſtate, the view which the mind has of God in *drawing nigh to him*, in whatever duty it be, yields it very great pleaſure and ſatisfaction. You are to take notice, that I am here only ſpeaking of the employment of the *Underſtanding* in every part of devotion; as to the particular duty of *Meditation*, I ſhall conſider it afterwards. Whatever the duty be in which we *draw nigh to God*, the *Underſtanding* is our guide; we can do nothing without it; that muſt ſupply thoughts ſuitable to the occaſion. Thinking in general is a wonderful operation of the mind; 'tis ſurpriſing to reflect on the communication which the ſoul has by this means with things inviſible, as well as viſible, the moſt diſtant as well as preſent objects: and tho' the thoughts are too often vain and fruitleſs, yet 'tis our own fault that they are ſo; nor can it be ſaid that the thoughts as employed in devotion are of this kind. The thoughts, at proper times, may uſefully converſe about other things, but however uſeful ſuch thoughts may be in their ſeaſon, it cannot be ſaid that they are of that uſe, and much leſs of that dignity and value, as thoſe of the mind when devoutly approaching its Maker. The ſoul at ſuch times is conſcious that it acts more worthy of itſelf, that theſe are the operations

operations for which it was chiefly made, and by which it is moſt ennobled: and if ſo, if in devotional thoughts there is a greater dignity and ſuitableneſs to the original deſign for which our underſtandings were given us, then there muſt be greater pleaſure.

2. THE faculty next in order is the *Will*, which cannot be more worthily employed than it is in devotion. By the *Underſtanding* the ſoul has only a ſight of the divine Object, by the *Will* it adheres to it; this is what the ſcripture means by [c] *ſeeking God with the whole heart*. The *Heart* is the ſame as the *Will*, and where devotion is ſincere is never wanting. The ſoul of the devout chriſtian does not lie ſtupid and motionleſs, but ſprings forward to the glorious Object, chuſes God as its portion, cleaves to him, and acquieſces in him. The *Will* is that band which on our part unites us to God. The chief active force of the ſoul lies in this faculty, and is never exerted to ſo excellent purpoſe as in devotion; when the ſoul with its whole ſtrength preſſes towards God, and with its whole weight centers itſelf in him: it firmly reſolves to be his, gives itſelf to him, and would willingly be intirely taken up by him. —Now theſe being the faculties exerciſed in devotion, and devotion being the very beſt exerciſe of theſe faculties, 'tis impoſſible

[c] Pſal. cxix. 2.

poſſible that true devotion ſhould not be in its own nature, and in its common influence, a delightful thing. All natural action is pleaſant, and as the pleaſure muſt be ſuitable to the faculty where that is more excellent, ſo muſt the pleaſure be; and then conſequently moſt excellent, where the faculties are the higheſt of all, and are employed in the moſt perfect operations.

4. BY devotion the powers of the ſoul are gradually raiſed to their perfection, and ſo prepared for the delightful performance of their proper functions, as occaſion offers. Any faculty is naturally ſtrengthned by proper exerciſe; nor is this leſs true of the faculties of the ſoul than of thoſe of the body. A life of ſloth and inactivity enervates the body, renders it ſluggiſh and indolent, and by degrees ſo indiſpoſes it for all action, that the leaſt labour is a burden. Like to this is the unhappy effect which want of education and inſtruction has upon the mind. When a perſon has been bred in ignorance, tho' he has really the ſame faculties as other men, yet in *appearance* he has not; they are feeble and unfurniſhed, and of little more uſe to him as to the rank he bears in the creation, than if they did not belong to his nature. He that has a barely civil education, and ſuch inſtruction and knowledge as relates to preſent things, and the more

commodious paſſing the preſent life, is far advanced above the perſon I have now mentioned; but 'tis *devotion* only, which adds the finiſhing hand, and perfects the faculties in the higheſt ſenſe of all. The perfection of the faculties is in order to happineſs; the chief happineſs of man is that which conſiſts in the enjoyment of God, the capacity for this enjoyment is therefore the perfection which I here intend; and as to this capacity, 'tis certain that nothing enlarges it ſo much as *devotion.* The *Underſtanding* is hereby more adapted to improvements in divine knowledge, and the *Will* feels an increaſing force and vigour; the conſequence of which is, that the man becomes better fitted, not only for the enjoyments of the heavenly ſtate, when he ſhall be made perfect in knowledge and holineſs, but for the ſtated ordinary duties of the chriſtian life in this world; he goes from ſtrength to ſtrength; the ways of wiſdom are more pleaſant to him, his difficulties leſſen, temptations are more eaſily overcome, the high-places are made plain, and the rough even, and he advances with greater ſpeed in the way of his duty, and is able to [d] *run the race that is ſet before him, looking unto Jeſus the author and finiſher of his faith.*—Theſe are ſome of the conſiderations which demonſtrate

[d] Hebr. xii. 1, 2.

ſtrate the pleaſure and advantage of *devotion* in general.

AND from the whole what are we to conclude, but that the *moſt devout* are the *moſt happy*; that in the ſame proportion as men *draw nearer to God*, they draw nearer to that which we are all purſuing, I mean contentment, ſatisfaction, and tranquility of ſoul? Would we be happy? the ſureſt and ſhorteſt, I might have ſaid the only way to this, is to be devout; to labour after a temper of mind which will qualify us for the duties of religion, and enable us to delight in them. And how is ſuch a temper acquired? by conſtancy in the performance of holy duties, which, as the ſeaſons for them come round, we ſhould not omit upon any pretence whatſoever; and a holy regularity at other times, ordering our converſation aright, with chriſtian prudence and care, not taking liberties unallowed by our religion, and for which we ſhall pay dear afterwards; practiſing every virtue as we have opportunity for it, and baulking no fair occaſion of doing good to ourſelves or others. A conduct like this will naturally beget a humble confidence towards God, and a greater diſpoſition for the duties of piety, the conſequence of both which will be, a greater delight in the performance of them; for when the mind is kept pure and free from all corrupt and in-

ordinate paſſions, and the conſcience calm and undiſturbed, the mind will have leſs to retard it in its aſcent to God, and all thoſe pious and heavenly affections will grow up in it which are the very life and ſpirit of devotion.

II. I am next to illuſtrate this truth of the pleaſure and advantage of devotion, by a diſtinct conſideration of the ſeveral particular duties in which the ſoul *draws nigh to God*; and this I ſhall do in a following diſcourſe.

SER-

SERMON V.

Of the pleaſures, and advantage of devotion.

PSALM lxxiii. 28.

It is good for me to draw near to God.

ON theſe words I have made the following obſervation, *That a devout approach to God in the exerciſes of divine worſhip is attended with pleaſure and advantage to the ſoul.* This Propoſition I undertook to prove and illuſtrate by applying myſelf

I. To the conſideration of *devotion* in general; and I have repreſented its nature, pleaſure, and advantages.

II. To the conſideration of the particular duties of it, *viz.* prayer, ſinging the praiſes of God, reading and hearing his word, meditation, and the holy communion. This

part of my design I am now to execute, and let us begin

1. WITH *Prayer*, herein it is good to draw nigh to God. The advantage of this duty is great upon many accounts, and exceeding obvious to any who will consider it. I shall only consider it as admirably adapted to exercise and improve those several virtues on which the credit of religion, and the pleasure and happiness of the religious do most visibly depend; such as divine love, gratitude, trust in the Providence of God under all the trials and vicissitudes of the present life, contentment, hope in the mercy of God for whatever relates to our spiritual and everlasting welfare, heavenly-mindedness, or fervent aspirations of soul after that [a] *fulness of joy which is in* the *presence of God*, and *those rivers of pleasure which are at his right hand forever more*; and finally, charity. *Divine Love* deservedly appears in the head of this sacred band; love to the Author of our Being, the center of all perfection, and fountain of all good, than which surely nothing can be more reasonable or more delightful; and tho' this flame is kindled from above, yet what more apparent than that it is done by prayer, as the chief instrumental means? that devotion which

[a] Psal. xvi. 11.

which ſhould mingle in all our prayers, conſiſts mightily in the exerciſe of this ſublime affection; and in order to have our ſacrifice conſumed by this fire of the altar, we do in our converſes with God ſet ourſelves to contemplate his lovelineſs and his love, his unbounded goodneſs, and its numberleſs effects. The breath of prayer fans the holy fire, we are naturally led to love that God by whom we are allowed this freedom of acceſs, and in whoſe preſence we find ſuch ſweet contentment and reſt; and as in other caſes, ſo here the friendſhip between the Creator and the creature is increaſed with the increaſe of their acquaintance. "O "Love, thou offspring of heaven! why is "my heart ſuch a ſtranger to thee? why "does it experience no more of thy quick-"ning influences, thy inexpreſſible delight? "have I not too much reaſon to think it is "becauſe I am not more frequent and earn-"eſt in my prayers? did I ſtrive more with "this dull and cold heart of mine to raiſe and "warm it, in my addreſſes to the ſupreme "Being, I ſhould ſoon perceive the good "effects of this method, I ſhould love God "with more fervour, and ſerve him with "more diligence." That diſpoſition of ſoul which we call gratitude, ſo near akin to love that it may properly enough be made a branch of it, a virtue of a moſt heavenly

nature as well as extraction, is greatly promoted by the ſame means; for tho' the duty of prayer has its name from the *petitioning* part, yet ought it to conſiſt of *thankſgiving too*, and is very imperfect where *thankſgiving* has not ordinarily a pretty large ſhare, in the heart at leaſt, if not in the outward form of words. *Thankſgiving* looks back to mercies paſt, which it regiſters in the memory, and engraves in the heart; while *Prayer*, ſtrictly ſo called, looks forward to mercies yet to come. Which account of *thankſgiving*, or *gratitude*, ſhews it to be a virtue of eminent dignity, and indiſpenſably neceſſary to our pleaſing God in our applications to him for mercy; ſince it can never be ſuppoſed he will continue to ſhower down his favours, when they are as rain falling on a rock, on which it makes little or no impreſſion, or as treaſure thrown into a deep gulph, where it is ſwallowed up and loſt. The expreſſions of a thankful heart appear from hence to be as neceſſary as they are ornamental to our prayers: and thankſgiving increaſes that thankfulneſs from which it proceeds, the habit of gratitude is improved by frequent acts, and, conſequently, by a devout and conſtant practice of prayer, in which we are ſo plainly invited, and ſo ſtrongly obliged to acts of praiſe. And whereas it may be thought poſſible for men

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to be *thankful* to God for his mercies, who never *pray* to him for them, this is evidently a very great miſtake. Bleſſings not received in the way of prayer, would be look'd upon as coming in the *natural* courſe of things, without the particular *deſign* or *direction* of God; or we ſhould not be able to avoid ſuſpecting our title to them, and ſuſpecting this, we ſhould not ſo clearly diſcern the kindneſs and love of God in them, which is the very thing that muſt infuſe life and ſpirit into our thankſgivings.—*Truſt in the Providence of God* under all the trials and viciſſitudes of the preſent life, is likewiſe very much indebted to the conſtant returns of prayer performed in the beſt manner we are able. This truſt in God (which is nothing elſe than the general belief of his Providence applied and reduced into practice) is to be exercis'd in a diſtinct and explicit manner, when we preſent ourſelves before the throne of divine Grace, and by being thus continually exerciſed, is much ſtrengthned and improved. The various diſpenſations of Providence are of uſe to increaſe our truſt, by the neceſſity they lay us under of exerting it according to the changing nature of our condition, there being none who ordinarily excel ſo much in this virtue, as thoſe who have paſs'd thro' the greateſt diverſity of outward events, and experienc'd the

the goodneſs and faithfulneſs of God in them all; after much the ſame manner as thoſe ſoldiers are moſt ready in handling their arms, who have been kept under ſtrict diſcipline, and conſtantly exerciſed. But then this beneficial influence of Providence on our truſt, is only when prayer goes along with it, which is one reaſon that where the diſpenſations of Providence are much the ſame in regard of two or more perſons, the effect is ſo very different; one continuing as diſtruſtful and reſtleſs as ever, while another learns to commit himſelf with a more intire confidence to the diſpoſal and conduct of his heavenly Father: one of theſe perſons lives in the neglect of prayer, or is regardleſs how he prays; the other is much in prayer, and carries the ſame regard to God, and confidence in him, which he exerciſes in this duty, into all the circumſtances of his life, and every part of his converſation. The conſequence of this is, that the man who gives himſelf to prayer, will be contented in the condition and circumſtances allotted him whatever they are; he has often, and very ſincerely begged of God to do that which is beſt for him, and hereby wrought himſelf into a humble and ſtedfaſt truſt that he would grant him his requeſt; when therefore the event declares what

what the will of God is, he cannot but be eaſy under it, becauſe he knows that it ſhall turn to his good, let the preſent appearance of things be never ſo unpromiſing. The chriſtian who is moſt in prayer, will of courſe be moſt contented, he will pray himſelf into a quiet reſigned frame, as well as obtain it in recompence of his piety and devotion. Now contentment with what we have, in a world where we cannot, and it is not fit we ſhould have all we deſire, is the neareſt approach to the happineſs of the heavenly ſtate, which conſiſts in having none but reaſonable deſires, and all theſe deſires crowned with enjoyment. 'Tis farther certain, that prayer nouriſhes *Hope* in the mercy of God for whatever relates to our ſpiritual and everlaſting welfare. In being called to prayer, we are called to hope; for to what end would prayer be without hope? and as we are in a ſpecial manner to pray for thoſe things which concern the ſalvation of our ſouls, and our happineſs in another life, ſo we muſt of conſequence be allowed to hope for them. This hope, which is authorized and encouraged by the very command to pray, does, from the duty of prayer frequently and carefully performed, receive a continual and conſiderable acceſſion of life and vigour. Our hope, it may be, at firſt is languid and wavering, and mingled with ſo much

much fear and anxiety, as deprives us of all ſenſible comfort and relief from it, however, tho' ſmall, our hope is that which prevails with us to pray and not faint; and perſevering in prayer, we find that our hopes receive ſtrength, till they come to be more rooted and abounding, ſo as to ſtay our ſouls, and preſerve them calm and peaceful in the views of eternity.

A HEAVENLY frame of mind naturally reſults from the ſerious and conſtant diſcharge of this duty. For what elſe is prayer but an abſtraction of the mind from preſent ſenſible objects, in order to its being turned towards thoſe of a different and a nobler nature? the raiſing the ſoul from earthly to heavenly things? TheGod we ſerve is an inviſible Being, and the chief bleſſings we implore at his hand have little or no relation to this viſible world: hence it proceeds, that the mind in prayer gradually riſes to a ſpirituality of temper, has other reliſhes and inclinations, and is to be ſatisfied with no happineſs but one that is ſpiritual and divine, a happineſs ſuited to its own nature, and to the nature and perfections of the ſupreme Being, whom, by continual ſupplications to him as the Author of its felicity, it learns to regard as the Object of it too; with ardent longings crying out,

" [c] *Whom have I in heaven but thee, and*
" *there is none upon earth that I desire be-*
" *sides thee! Thou art my portion, O Lord,*
" *as such I chuse thee! O that I knew where*
" *to find thee, that I might come even to*
" *thy seat!* This is what I must despair of
" while I am here, to find thee in this clear
" and satisfying manner; I therefore long
" for a more perfect state, in comparison
" of which I despise this scene of vanity,
" with all its empty and transitory enjoy-
" ments." It is by this, among other means, that the soul comes to be disengaged from the world, to set its affections upon things above, and to carry higher views, and more generous sentiments into the management of common affairs, than worldly minds are capable of forming; thus [d] *having its conversation in heaven*, where it hopes to have its everlasting abode. Finally, Prayer widens the heart, and fills it with the most diffusive *charity* or benevolence. Being used to pray with and for others, we unite ourselves to them in the bonds of the most tender affection, as children of the same common parent, and sharers in the same common happiness; we love them as we love ourselves, *i. e. without dissimulation*, look upon their interest as our own, and in that view sincerely desire it, rejoice in it, and as we have

[c] Psal. lxxiii. 25. cxix. 57. [d] Philip. iii. 20.

have opportunity, promote it. Now next to the *love of God*, what affection is there that more exalts and adorns our nature than the *love of mankind*, an universal and disinterested love? or how can any disposition of mind give us a nearer resemblance of the Deity? [e] *God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.* Nor is this excellent affection more influential upon the happiness of others, than it is on our own; it is a most pleasing sensation, and wherever it is a guest, pays liberally for its entertainment. That we may feel the power of so amiable and so agreeable a passion, let us in our prayers as unfeignedly recommend *others* to the divine mercy as we do *ourselves*. This is one [f] condition of an acceptable prayer, that we harbour not envy, and malice, and revenge in our bosoms. Prayer will help to kill these poisonous weeds, and cultivate and improve that love which is the original growth of our nature, being planted in it by the hand of God himself. This happy plant will languish or revive with the spirit of prayer and devotion. More than this, I think, there needs not to convince any one of the great advantages and pleasure of *drawing nigh to God* in the duty of prayer; tho', if it were needful

[e] 1 John iv. 16. [f] Matt. vi. 14, 15.

needful, a great deal more might be mentioned *.

2. *It is good to draw nigh to God* in that part of devotion which consists in *Singing the praises of God.* The excellence and pleasure of this duty is as great as the obligation to it is plain. Pious affections do naturally vent themselves this way, and upon this is founded that apostolical direction, [g] *Is any one merry* (filled with religious joy and thankfulness) *let him sing Psalms.* The disciples of Christ were to [h] *teach and admonish one another in Psalms and Hymns and spiritual Songs, singing with grace in their hearts unto the Lord*; or as it is in another place *making melody in their hearts unto the Lord.* One intire book of scripture, the book of *Psalms*, has its denomination from hence; the word *Psalm*, according to its *Greek* derivation, being the same as our *English* word *Song.* And can there be a nobler exercise than this, the matter of which is generally taken from the infinite Excellencies and Perfections of God, or from the wonders of Creation, Providence, and Redemption? and how well fitted is this manner of celebrating the praises of God to feed and increase that devotion which it so well expresses?

* See particularly the Author's Essay on the Rational Grounds of Prayer, annex'd to the Discourse on Secret Prayer.

[g] James v. 13. [h] Colos. iii. 16. Eph. v. 19.

expreſſes? In the language of the devout *Pſalmiſt*, [i] *the tongue is our glory* and is never ſo truly ſuch, as when it conſpires to ſhow forth the glory of the great Parent and Fountain of all things. Muſic has a very powerful effect upon the human paſſions, and when it is of the religious kind, by conveying the moſt ſublime ideas and ſtriking thoughts in an apt and proper manner, 'tis wonderfully ſuited to kindle and keep alive the very beſt affections of the ſoul. "O "how have I wept, (ſaith St. *Auſtin* of him-"ſelf) how exceedingly mov'd and affected "have I been at the hymns, and ſongs, and "harmonious voices of the Church! Theſe "voices pierced my ears, the truth entered "my ſoul, devout affections were rais'd, "and tears flowed." The worſhip of heaven is repreſented in ſeveral places of the book of *Revelations* under this form of deſcription, [k] *They ſing the ſong of Moſes,* the *ſervant of God, and the ſong of the Lamb, ſaying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; juſt and true are thy ways thou King of ſaints!* And again, *I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, ſaying, Halleluiah, ſalvation, and glory, and honour, and power unto the Lord our God!* The leaſt that this can ſignify is, that there is ſomething heavenly in this duty, ſomething

[i] Pſal. lvii. 8. [k] Revel. xv. 3, 4. xix. 1.

thing fitted to elevate the mind unto a temper like that of the inhabitants of this bleſſed world, [1] *who reſt not day or night, ſaying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.* * And 'tis very remarkable, that ſinging in the worſhip of God is ſo much the voice of nature, and a dictate of common reaſon, that no religion, true or falſe, has been without it: there was ſcarce any ſolemn ſervice performed to their gods, either by *Greeks* or *Barbarians*, without muſic; muſic was thought to be a thing ſo heavenly that their gods were accounted the chief inventors of it. The ſoul is cheared and animated by this ſpiritual melody, is aſſiſted in throwing off any load which hangs heavy upon it, and to go on with greater delight in the ways of piety.

3. WE *draw nigh to God* in *reading and hearing his moſt holy word*; and in this way it may be truly ſaid to be *good for us to draw nigh* unto him. [m] *The law of the Lord is perfect converting the ſoul, the teſtimonies of the Lord are ſure making wiſe the ſimple.* [n] Being *given by the inſpiration of God*, this ſacred book *is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for inſtruction in righteouſneſs*; ſo as to make us *perfect* in our

[1] Revel. iv. 8. * See *Patrick* on 1 Chr. xv. 16. [m] Pſal. xix. 7. [n] 2 Tim. iii. 16.

religious capacity, and *thoroughly furniſhed for every good work.* The benefits of devoutly reading the word of God, and hearing the great truths of it explained, and the ſeveral duties preſcribed by it inforced in the miniſtry of the goſpel are innumerable, and of the greateſt value. Do we need inſtruction? here we have it, acceſs to thoſe lively oracles is never denied us; we have not only the liberty, but a command to come and learn from hence *the deep things of God*, even his *whole counſel*, which is here declared to us by his only begotten Son. There is a congruity between all truth and the mind of man, the mind being made for the knowledge of truth; and if all, much more *divine* truth is the treaſure of the ſoul; and of this truth there is no ſuch repoſitory as the Bible. Here a new, a moſt extenſive ſcene is opened to us, and if our eyes are opened to it, and fixed upon it, we ſhall behold wondrous things in the book of God; God will hereby [o] *give us underſtanding in all things.* Have we doubts in which we want ſatisfaction? the beſt way to have them removed is to apply to the word of God, this will aſſiſt us in judging of our own character or ſtate, caſting ſuch a light upon it, that we ſhall eaſily diſcern what it is, if we are in earneſt deſirous

[o] 2 Tim. ii. 7.

ſirous to know it. The man who is converſant in the ſcriptures, joining herewith the impartial examination of his heart and ways, cannot well be miſtaken in the judgment he paſſes upon himſelf; a compariſon of his life with the law of God, with both which he is ſuppoſed to be acquainted, will ſoon ſatisfy him what his life hath been, and will farther be a happy means of reſolving his doubts in the particular caſes and circumſtances which may occur in the progreſs of his life, even thoſe which are moſt difficult: having this guide, and following his guide as cloſely as he can, he will not be ſo apt to miſtake his way; ſome doubtful caſes there may be, which after all his pains will remain ſo, but few in compariſon, and even theſe ſuch as will not very much diſquiet his mind; for endeavouring to know his duty as it is marked out to him in the word of God, and to practiſe it according to the knowledge he has of it; all the doubt he has in ſome uncommon caſes will be about the *abſolute* nature of the action, not it's *relative*; what it is in *itſelf*, not what it is to *him*; who is ſure of pleaſing God while he takes that ſide of the queſtion which, upon the whole, has the greateſt probabilities attending it. Does he need to be quickned? is he in a dull, languid, indifferent ſtate of ſoul? converſing with the word of

God read and preached is a very likely means of putting him into a more lively frame. How often is a man rouzed out of his indolence by the conversation of a friend? thus, by attending to the voice of God in his word, the soul is many times cured of its languors; it meets with something or other in reading a portion of scripture, or in a sermon, that strikes it of a sudden, gives a happy turn to its thoughts, and makes it more diligent and active. Finally, is the christian's soul bowed down within him? does he want comfort in affliction? [p] *The commandments of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart*, saith the devout King; and again, *this is my comfort in my affliction, for thy word has quickned me.* Here are arguments of consolation suited to the most distressed and melancholy condition. Let the trouble be what it will, *temporal* or *spiritual*, in the course of reading or hearing the word of God, we meet with considerations fitted to relieve the mind from its sadness, and to support it under the heaviest pressures, taken from the forgiving mercy of God, the wisdom and extensiveness of his love, his knowing and doing what is best for all them that fear him, and making [q] *those light afflictions which are but for a moment to work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of*

[p] Psal. xix. 8. cxix. 50. [q] 2 Cor. iv. 17.

of glory, and to work in them a greater meetneſs of ſoul for it.

THESE are ſome of the advantages flowing from an intimate acquaintance with the word of God, to which we arrive by giving ourſelves to the ſtudy of it, and attending to thoſe things which are ſpoken by the miniſters of the goſpel agreeably to this ſacred ſtandard. When we make conſcience of our duty in theſe reſpects, waiting upon God, and drawing nigh to him in the means he has appointed, we juſtly expect his bleſſing, which will render the reading and hearing his word effectual to the beſt purpoſes.

4. IN *holy meditation* the ſoul *draws nigh* to *God*, and with very great pleaſure and advantage. Meditation here is conſidered as a diſtinct exerciſe of the mind. There is no duty of religion but ſhould be attended with thought and reflection, without which it will be of very little benefit to the performer; but here I ſuppoſe the chriſtian to collect his thoughts in order to fix them as *intenſely* as he can upon divine ſubjects. And perhaps, the pleaſure and advantage of this exerciſe of meditation will appear in the moſt convincing manner, if we *exemplify* it on a few of thoſe numberleſs ſubjects upon which it may be made to turn.

—LET the firſt ſubject about which we ſuppoſe our meditations to be employed, be *The chief end of man*, what he was deſigned for by his Creator, and what he himſelf ſhould principally deſign. I find myſelf plac'd amidſt a world of objects; but as man in paradice, till one of the ſame ſpecies was formed, found not a help-meet for him among all the inferior creatures, ſo among thoſe numberleſs objects which ſurround me, and that diverſity of purſuits in which I ſee men ingaged relating to the preſent life, I find none worthy of my higheſt choice, that can ſatisfy my deſires, and ſhould terminate my views and proſpects. No certainly, I was made for ſomething elſe than juſt to provide for the fleſh to fulfil the luſts thereof. I have ſomething elſe to mind than what is before me, or what I am capable of enjoying, or liable to ſuffer for the poor ſcantling of time that I am to live in this world. Yes, O my God, when I conſider what thou art, and what I am myſelf, and what this world and ſtate of exiſtence is, I am convinced that I have ſomething elſe to do than to pleaſe my ſenſes, and gratify my paſſions, and to purſue the road that fancy and inclination would perſuade me to take! I am capable of other things, of a higher life, of a nobler and more laſting felicity, and therefore, doubtleſs was made

made for them. For how ſhould I know the end for which my Creator deſigned me, but from the capacities which he has given me? he who created me being infinite in wiſdom, cannot have furniſhed me with faculties ſo vaſtly diſproportioned to the chief end of my Being, as 'tis evident they are to the cares, and buſineſs, and pleaſures of this life; theſe therefore are not my principal end, becauſe my ſoul is too big for them, and my deſires and thoughts run over the wideſt veſſel of created good. We conclude with the greateſt certainty, that the waters of the ocean were not made for any other place than that which contains them, becauſe, were the hollow much leſs deep and capacious, they muſt overflow and drown the world. This world, and this momentary life, can no more confine my deſires, than a ſmall cavern of the earth can be a fit receptacle for the ocean. I infer therefore, that I was made for ſomething elſe.—And if I enquire what, my thoughts, if they are not darkned by ignorance, and perverted by luſts, naturally lead me to God himſelf, who is the firſt cauſe of my being, as the laſt end of it too. He *has made all things for himſelf*, man particularly and eſpecially; other things are made to diſplay the glory of God by the impreſſes of power, wiſdom, and goodneſs, which they bear upon them;

man to glorify God in an active manner, by honourable thoughts and apprehensions of God, correspondent affections to him, and a life led in conformity to his will; that glorifying God after this manner in this world, he may enjoy him in the next. If I *glorify God with my body and soul which are his*, he will make me completely and eternally happy in both. I own, O God, the singular honour thou hast put upon thy creature, in forming him for so glorious an end! O may I have this end always in view, and form my whole conversation and behaviour upon this important truth, *That I was made for God!* —Let our next meditation be on the *Love of God. God is love*, this is his nature, of which goodness is an essential perfection, and he has loved us. But how he has loved us who will pretend to say, so as to trace his love in the variety of methods which it has taken in order to make us happy, and to describe and celebrate it in the manner it deserves? O unfathomable love which stoops so low, even from the infinite heights of the divine Majesty and Perfection, to visit us the sinful sons of men! O love without bounds, or which has no other bounds but what we set to it by our unthankfulness! Let us be grateful to God, and he will never cease to be good to us; there is nothing which his mercy will deny us;

us; and which is more, *his mercy towards us will endure forever.* Let me consider, O my soul! that the love of God is a moral perfection, and that therefore he does not, he cannot love all alike. With a love of *benevolence* or *good-will* he embraces all, till by their frequent forfeitures of this love, and continuing obstinately to refuse the offers of it, and even to abuse it, they provoke him to withdraw it from them, and to leave them to reap the fruits of their own perverseness and folly; but his love of *complacency* is peculiar to those who resemble him. Can I delight in God as a most holy Being? is he glorious in my eyes upon the account of his holiness? do I love holiness, and esteem myself no farther than as I have it as a habit and principle residing in me? then 'tis certain that I love God, and am beloved of him. This love of *complacency* terminates first on *things*, and then on *persons.* God *loves righteousness*, and therefore loves the *righteous*; and therefore according to the measure of righteousness, or real inward holiness is the measure of this love. And is not this a very disirable thing to be the object of the divine delight? can there be a greater honour than this, or a more certain earnest of happiness? See here, O my soul, the only way to it! continue a slave to sin, to any one sin, and thou can'st never be a child

child of God. Can he love thee, while thou ſuffereſt that to reign in thy boſom which is the moſt hateful thing to him in the whole world; nay, properly ſpeaking, the only hateful thing, for God hateth nothing but ſin? When I think of this, I am ſenſible of the folly of giving myſelf up to be ſwayed by ſenſual and worldly paſſions, by the love of pleaſure, or money, or any other earthly good; and much more by diabolical ones, ſuch as envy, malice, hatred, and revenge; and all the while flattering myſelf that he [r] *who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity* can look on me with pleaſure *who am ſold under ſin.* No, before I can be an object of God's *complacential* love, I muſt, in ſome degree, become qualified for it; and bleſſed be his name, ſuch is his love of *benevolence* and *compaſſion*, that he will aſſiſt my ſincere endeavours after holineſs, and if I *yield myſelf up to him*, will lead me on to the perfection of it!

How uſeful are theſe meditations? let us therefore purſue the ſame exerciſe a little farther, and meditate a while on the *Happineſs of the future ſtate.* Let me raiſe my thoughts as high, and ſpread them as wide as I can, I find, after all, ſuch are the heights and depths, the lengths and breadths of this happineſs, as well as of the love which procured

[r] Habbak. i. 13.

procured it, as to surpass my apprehension. [s] *Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entred into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them who love him.* And so far is this from being a lessening to the value of these things, that they are at present unconceivable, as to exalt our notion of their greatness and excellence. [t] *It does not yet appear what we shall be*; why? because any happiness in this life falls so infinitely short of the *glory which shall be revealed in the saints*, that the world we live in will not so much as furnish us with images and resemblances by which it may be shadowed out to us with any tolerable life and clearness. We cannot now raise our thoughts and conceptions to what we shall hereafter enjoy; not that we are altogether in the dark about it; thanks be to God this is not our condition, [u] *Life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel.* We have light enough to discover another world besides this, and to discern the objects of it so far as to be able to conclude, that all the things of this world are as *nothing*, compared with those of *eternity*. *Here* my time is divided between enjoyment and suffering, *there* 'tis all pleasure and enjoyment; not one sigh is ever heard from that heavenly society, but *everlasting*

[s] 1 Cor. ii. 9. [t] 1 John iii. 2. [u] 2 Tim. i. 10.

laſting Halleluiahs. Here enjoyment itſelf does often diſappoint us, the diſappointments we meet with in a ſhort life are without number; *there* we ſhall live to eternal ages, and not know a ſingle diſappointment, nothing ſhall fall ſhort of our expectations, but rather every thing exceed them. So far are we from overtaking the happineſs we purſue in the world (eſpecially if we ſeek for it in things of this world) that we are often tempted by the baffles, and vexations, and interruptions we meet with, to queſtion whether there is ſuch a thing as happineſs at all. And very true it is, that there is nothing deſerving that name under the ſun. [x] *Vanity of vanity, all is vanity* to him who looks not beyond the preſent ſcene. But now only draw the veil, and you ſee a happineſs equal to your largeſt capacities, a happineſs which will ſatisfy every deſire, ſilence every complaint, and leave you nothing to wiſh for; no not ſo much as the continuance of it, becauſe you know, without wiſhing for it, that it will continue forever. And when ſuch a happineſs as this courts my choice, and invites me to purſue after it, ſhall I ſuffer myſelf to be deluded by the empty ſhadow of this world? at leaſt let me firſt ſit down and think what I part with in giving up my hopes of heaven, before I am

[x] Eccl. i. 2.

am guilty of such an instance of prodigality. Wasting the whole world, if I had it for my portion, and bringing myself to beggary, will not parallel this folly of turning my back upon eternal happiness, and following after lying vanities. The very hope of heaven is vastly preferable to any earthly thing. Let me have this hope, and I am happy by anticipation. For what is it I hope for in hoping for heaven? I hope for a state in which happiness, in full measure, and running over shall be given into my bosom; in which all the perfections of the divine nature shall shine out with the greatest lustre, and all contribute to our happiness, in which they will all unite; a state in which the *Understanding*, filled with divine knowledge, shall resemble a region of pure and glorious *light*; and the *Heart* with infinite transport feel the full, the overflowing influence of *divine love* quickening and transforming it; a state in which we shall be possessed of the noblest pleasures, and share them with the most excellent society, shall [y] *join with the spirits of just men made perfect*, converse with an *innumerable company of angels*, be admitted into the presence of *Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant*, and behold the face of God the *Creator and Judge of all.* O what a pleasure must the meditation

[y] Hebr. xii. 22, 3, 4.

meditation on ſuch a happineſs as this afford all thoſe who have a well-grounded hope of it! O heavenly Father make me *to abound in this hope!* I am determined it ſhall hence-forward be my principal ſtudy how to get, and enlarge, and eſtabliſh it, and that there ſhall be nothing neceſſary to this end which I will neglect doing; foraſmuch as this hope will more than recompence me for all the difficulties, and labours, and ſtruggles which I can paſs through in a life of the ſtricteſt virtue and piety.

THUS I have given you a few examples of the pleaſure and advantage of religious *meditation*, and enlarged upon them, that I might ſet the truth I am proving in a more affecting light. After all this, will any one ſay, that it is not *good for us to draw nigh to God* in *holy meditation*, as well as in other exerciſes of devotion? would not ſuch meditations, managed according to our ſeveral opportunities and abilities, (for the meaſure of duty is not the ſame to all, any more than the capacities and advantages of all are the ſame) yield great profit to the devout ſoul? raiſe its views, nouriſh its hopes, confirm its reſolutions, ſtrengthen and perfect its virtue? has it not an aſſimulating power ſo as to change the mind more and more into a temper more and more ſuited to the nature of thoſe ſpiritual, and divine,

vine, and heavenly objects, with which it is conversant? I will conclude the proof with adding,

5. *It is good to draw nigh to God* in the *Lord's-Supper.* It cannot be expected that I should reckon up all the advantages which accompany the devout performance of this duty, or even as many as will naturally occur to the thoughts of the worthy communicant, because what I now offer comes in only as part of another subject. I shall insist only on these *two* advantages; *viz.* its being of admirable service to awaken in our minds a lively sense of our obligations to *God*, and the *Lamb*; and to encourage our future expectations from them.

1. GREAT is the advantage arising from a devout participation of the *Lord's-Supper*, as it tends to awaken in our minds a more lively sense of our *obligations* to the love of God, and of the Lamb. Yes, [z] *God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* And the same may be said of *the only begotten of the Father*, [a] *that he loved us* (us a degenerate race of creatures) *and gave himself for us a sacrifice and an offering to God of a sweet smelling savour.* The love of the Father and of the Son is the great foundation of this sacramental institution,

[z] John iii. 16. [a] Ephes. v. ii.

tion, which had never been but for this love. In this ſacred action [b] *we ſhow forth the death of Chriſt*, and in that his *love*, which made him willing to die for us, and the *love of God* which [c] *gave him up to death for us all.* And muſt not the remembrance of ſuch love be delightful? can it be otherwiſe if we believe ourſelves to have any ſhare in it? and whoſe fault is it if we have not? the ſincere chriſtian, who loves God and his Saviour, cannot reaſonably doubt of his being the object of redeeming love. And ſurely there is ſomething in the conſideration of the [d] *kindneſs of God to man* peculiarly fitted to raiſe the ſoul into a holy joy and triumph. Hath God in the councils of his eternal wiſdom contrived my everlaſting ſalvation; and hath the Son of God condeſcended to execute this gracious deſign, [e] *by humbling himſelf to death, even the death of the croſs?* what a thought is here! how ſurprizingly agreeable! how does it overcome, and raviſh the mind, and cauſe the *ſoul to magnify the Lord, and all that is within us to bleſs his holy name!* The fire does not more naturally beget heat in the body when it comes near to it, than the reflection on this wonderful love does joy and gladneſs of heart. The heart exults in the thought of

[b] 1 Cor. xi. 26. [c] Rom. viii. 32. [d] Tit. iii. 4. [e] Philip. ii. 8.

of its being the object of such love. And then the sense of our *obligations* to God and the Lamb, which the remembrance of this love in the *Supper* awakens in us is as profitable, as the remembrance itself is delightful, proving a most powerful motive to gratitude and obedience in the course of the christians life. Do I consider how infinitely I am obliged to God in giving his Son to die for me, and can I do less in return than give myself to him, with a resolution to employ all my powers, and faculties, all that I have, and am, in his service, and to his glory? I cannot well forbear making this return, if duly sensible of the greatness of my obligations; and perhaps, nothing hath a greater aptitude to strengthen the conviction of our duty, than beholding the representations of Christ's death in the memorials of his body and blood, and, at the same time, reflecting why and for whom he died. There is no one who behaves as he should while at the *Lord's-Table*, but must go away from it possessed with a deep sense of his unspeakable engagements to the love of Jesus, and strongly determined to do his utmost to fulfil them, by being more active for his Saviour, and more exact and constant in keeping his commandments.

2. A devout participation of the *Lord's-Supper* is of excellent use to encourage our

future expectations from God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Hath not God withheld his Son from me, and can I question his [f] *giving me all other things*, as far as they are needful and convenient for me? will he who bestows the greater deny the less? Hereby Christ crucified for us becomes an earnest of every thing else which is truly desirable; especially of every *spiritual, good,* and *perfect gift*, of all necessary supplies of grace here, as well as of glory hereafter. What is there I may not expect from the goodness of God, when I have such pledges and assurances of it in my hand? if the goodness of God had not been infinite, it would not have express'd itself after this manner; and having express'd itself after this manner, I see there is nothing that can divert it from us, unworthy as we are of it, provided we do not by wilful unrepented sin resist its kind designs towards us. And certainly infinite goodness, not restrained in its exercise towards us, gives all the scope to our hopes and wishes that we can desire. Every want shall be supplied from the riches of that goodness, which flows out towards us in the blood of Jesus. After he has purchased us, and redemption for us at such an invaluable price, he will not suffer the whole design to prove abortive and ineffectual, thro'

[f] Rom. viii. 32.

thro' a defect of means and helps in order to our obtaining the salvation procured for us. No, our own sincere endeavours being suppos'd, the death of Christ which we commemorate in his *Supper*, is our security that we shall not want for any needful assistance in working out our salvation, that he who has begun a good work in us will perfect it; that he will pity and help our infirmities, *and make us more than conquerors thro' him who has loved us.* And thus by looking backward in this ordinance to the death of Christ, together with the principle from which it proceeded, and the design which it was intended to serve, we are taught to look forward with greater confidence in respect of the duties and trials of future life, assur'd that he who thus entertains us at his *Table*, will never leave or forsake us.

I WILL now conclude this Subject with a short Application.

1. How unjust is the prejudice which the carnal world have taken up against religion, as if it was a *joyless* and *melancholy* thing, of little use but to damp all the pleasure and comfort of life; whereas, indeed there are no pleasures like those of religion; nay, without religion, nothing which deserves the name of pleasure, in the esteem of a reasonable man: for as to the other plea-

ſures of life, what is it dignifies them, and gives them a value but religion, mingling with and directing them in a ſubſerviency to higher ſatisfactions, and a more exalted and durable felicity hereafter; of which when a man has a well grounded hope, he can venture *to rejoice in that portion of good which God giveth him under the ſun.* Only reflect a little, how far the condition of thoſe who are ſtrangers to the pleaſures of devotion is from bearing a compariſon with theirs who are acquainted with them. The enjoyments of the world do not yield half the ſweetneſs to the former of theſe, that they do to the latter; and then how often are they to ſeek for pleaſure? how often a burden to themſelves? and how ſad and darkſome is their proſpect? while the pious man has other ſources of pleaſure quite unknown to them; he delights to retire from the world to meet with God; he has another world to converſe with when tired with this, and by converſing with that world, is put in a way to uſe and enjoy this to greater advantage. Wherefore,

2. Let us no longer be diſobedient to the heavenly voice, but frequently and delightfully *draw nigh to God* in every way of his appointment. Let us not live eſtranged from God? let us intreat him that the Holy Spirit may kindle the ſacred fire in our hearts, and

and let us carefully tend it, diligently practiſe all thoſe means by which it may be kept perpetually burning, and be ſo far from ſeeking excuſes for the neglect of any duty, private or public, as to think with ourſelves how we may with the leaſt interruption, and with the greateſt benefit perform every one of them. Can we reaſonably hope to make life ſo eaſy and happy to ourſelves in any other way as this? ſhall we not by this means *walk with God*, and in the *light of his countenance*? ſhall we not have more peace in our own boſoms, and more confidence in the mercy of God? this will be ſomewhat of an eſſay towards the life of heaven; and if we do not in ſome meaſure live the life of heaven here upon earth, I do not ſee what great ground we can have to expect that we ſhall hereafter enter upon it, or how we can be qualified for it. Let us then, my friends, for the future make religion a *buſineſs*, regard the ſpirit of devotion as that which ſhould run thro' our whole lives, and indirectly influence our moſt common actions; and the exerciſes of devotion as a part of our daily employment, and what we ſhould embrace every convenient opportunity of performing. Let us not live in the omiſſion of *ſecret prayer* morning and evening; let not *family religion* be neglected; let us not abſent ourſelves from the *Houſe*

of God, or from the *Table of the Lord*; and let us endeavour to live ſo at all times, ſo holily and unblameably, and to have thoſe pious affections poſſeſſing our hearts, that we may be fitted in every duty to *draw nigh to God*, and reap the advantage of every religious performance in the following part of our conduct. Then ſhall we paſs the time of our ſojourning here more comfortably to ourſelves, more uſefully to others, and more to the glory of God, than we ſhould otherwiſe do, and ſhall attain to greater aſſurance of paſſing when we leave this world into the preſence of God, where there is fulneſs of joy, and happineſs everlaſting.

SER-

SERMON VI.

Of the change made in the earth by the Deluge, and its renovation after it.

GEN. viii. 21, 22.

——*And the Lord ſaid in his heart I will not, again curſe the ground any more for man's ſake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth: neither will I again ſmite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, ſeed-time and harveſt, and cold, and heat, and ſummer and winter, and day and night ſhall not ceaſe.*

MAN was created happy, but abode not long in his firſt eſtate: through the ſubtlety and malice of the devil, the great enemy of God and man, he was drawn to tranſgreſs the divine command, and for this tranſgreſſion was driven out of *Paradiſe*

And tho' this alone would have been a melancholy change, to be ſent forth from the garden of *Eden* (a place abounding with all manner of delights, and favoured with the peculiar preſence of God) to *till the ground from whence he was taken*, without any hopes of being again reſtored to his original ſtate, yet this was not all; what follows was ſtill worſe, his new habitation was [a] *curſed for his ſake*, and he himſelf condemned to toil, and pain, and ſorrow, without any proſpect of reſt till death ſhould bring it him. However God's firſt bleſſing upon the parents of our race (*to be fruitful and multiply and repleniſh the earth*) was not revoked; therefore ſprang there of theſe two *as many as the ſtars of the ſky in multitude, and as the ſand which is by the ſea-ſhore innumerable.* But, alas! with the numbers of mankind their vices too increaſed, till at length their [b] *wickedneſs was grown ſo great upon the earth*, that it is ſaid, *It repented the Lord that he had made man, and it grieved him at his heart.* The expreſſion is *figurative* and can only mean, that God acted after the ſame manner as men are wont to do when they heartily repent of a thing, (which is to undo it again as far as they are able) that is, he deſtroyed man whom he had created from the face of the earth; both man and beaſt, and

[a] Gen. iii. 17. [b] Gen. vi. 5, 6.

and creeping things, and the fowls of the air; of the many millions of men which we may ſuppoſe to have been then upon the earth, ſparing only *Noah* and his family, (for which this reaſon is given, that *he was righteous before God in that generation)* and ordering ſome of every kind of beaſts and fowls to be preſerved, as a new ſtock from which the earth after the Deluge might again be ſupplied with inhabitants. The waters being retired, and the earth dry enough for the creatures who were in the ark to go forth upon it, the firſt thing *Noah* does is to [c] *build an altar to the Lord, and to offer thereon burnt-offerings of every clean beaſt and fowl.* This act of piety was ſo acceptable to God, that it is ſaid, *he ſmelled a ſweet ſavour*, or *a ſavour of reſt*, which you will eaſily apprehend is a *metaphorical* expreſſion, ſignifying his being exceedingly pleas'd, not with the blood or wreeking ſtreams of the ſacrifice (for what delight can theſe afford to a pure ſpirit as God is?) but with the devotion of the offerer, thoſe humble prayers and grateful praiſes which aſcended from a pious heart, theſe are the ſacrifices which God will never deſpiſe, and which come up before him even into the holieſt of all. Hereupon the *Lord ſaid in his heart*, that is,

[c] Gen. viii. 20.

is, immediately determined, *I will not again curſe the ground any more for man's ſake*; &c.

THE words leads us to conſider theſe *two* things,

I. GOD'S renewing the face of the earth after the Deluge, and making it fit to be inhabited as before. This is plainly implied in the words.

II. HIS decree or purpoſe to preſerve the earth in the ſtate into which he now put it, as long as the earth itſelf ſhould continue. This the words expreſsly declare.

I. LET us briefly conſider what is plainly implied in the words, *viz.* God's renewing the face of the earth after the Deluge, and making it fit to be again inhabited. The promiſe *that while the earth remain'd, ſeed-time and harveſt, ſummer and winter, day and night ſhould not ceaſe*, doth clearly ſuppoſe this, that there ſhould be a regular ſucceſſion of the ſeaſons, and every ſeaſon ſhould have its reſpective uſes and advantages, ſo that the earth *ſhould be filled with the goodneſs of the Lord, and ſatisfied with the fruit of his works:* the ſame Almighty God who at the *creation* of the world ſaid, [d] *let the earth bring forth graſs, the herb yielding ſeed, and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after its kind*, now at the *renovation* of it [e] *cauſing the graſs to grow for the cattle, and herb for the ſervice of man to bring*

[d] Gen. i. 11. [e] Pſal. civ. 14.

bring forth fruit out of the earth, and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to ſhine, and bread that ſtrengtheneth man's heart. God bleſſed *Noah* and his ſons in like manner as he did *Adam* and *Eve*, ſaying, [f] *be fruitful and multiply and repleniſh the earth*; delivering all things into their hand as lords of this lower creation; and even allowing them the uſe of *animal* food, which was not in the original grant to *Adam*; ſo that here is a new commencement of things, a kind of ſecond birth, and God who was the Creator of man and of all the other tribes of inferior animals is now their gracious Reſtorer.

HERE a queſtion offers, not indeed of very great importance, however not altogether uſeleſs, *viz. whether the earth after the flood was put into a condition as good as that it was in before the fall, or at leaſt better than its antediluvian ſtate?* This has been the opinion of very learned men, (particularly *Biſhop Sherlock* and the late *Lord Barrington*,) who have endeavoured to prove, that the original curſe on the ground was *wholly* removed ſaith *one*, *in part only* ſaith *another*. According to the *firſt*, we are *as happy*, with regard to the world about us, as men would have been if the ſtate of Innocence had continued; according to the *latter*

[f] Gen. ix. 1.

latter not ſo happy as that, but much happier than thoſe who lived before the Deluge. But as theſe opinions are not agreeable to the received belief, ſo the more I examine them the leſs reaſon I ſee to go off from the common notion, that a conſiderable alteration for the worſe, with reſpect to the earth we live upon, was introduced by the fall; and the caſe inſtead of being mended by the Flood, render'd ſtill worſe upon theſe *two* accounts particularly, that it is *leſs healthful* and *leſs delightful.*

1. OUR earthly habitation is at preſent much *leſs healthful* than it was in the ſtate of innocence, or even before the Flood. In the *paradiſiacal* earth, ſickneſs, and pain, and death were utter ſtrangers, and would probably have ſo continued; but without a perpetual miracle how could this have been, if the products of the ground had not been more ſalubrious, and the ſeaſons more kindly and temperate than they are now? In ſuch a region as ours could a body of fleſh and blood be proof againſt all the injuries to which ours are liable, ſo as not to feel the inclemencies of the ſeaſons, or to ſuffer by the noxious exhalatians, and various and ſudden changes of the atmoſphere? Is this a fit world for the ſons of immortality to dwell in? and what ſhall we ſay to the long lives of the *antediluvian* Patriarchs? Does not this naturally

rally lead one to think, that the earth had ſome advantages then which it wants now? nay, does it not oblige us to conclue ſo? how elſe could they have held out ſo long? We will allow they were born with happier conſtitutions; but ſurely their ſtrengh was not *the ſtrength of ſtones*, neither was *their fleſh of braſs*, that they ſhould endure for ſo many hundred years, if they had not had the advantage of us from *without*, as well as from *within*. 'Tis true, the firſt generations of men after the Flood were much longer lived than we are; but however attained not to above half the age of their anceſtors; after which the life of man ſhortned apace, which we have no reaſon to think was brought about without *ſecond* cauſes. And what were theſe *ſecond* cauſes but chiefly the *earth* and the *air*, which have a mutual influence upon one another? A change in theſe would gradually produce a change in the bodies of men till the original ſtock of native vigour with which the human race ſat out was quite ſpent, and there was no living out a few ſcore years without good management.

2. As the preſent earth is *leſs healthful*, ſo *leſs delightful* than in its *paradiſiacal*, or even its *antediluvian* ſtate. Health itſelf is one of the moſt delightful enjoyments of life, and the foundation of all others, which loſe their

their value in the ſame degree as a man wants health to uſe and reliſh them. And therefore were there nothing elſe to make it preferable, yet in the ſame proportion as any place is the ſeat of health, it muſt be the ſeat of pleaſure too. But beſides this we are farther to conſider, that the ſame things which contribute to health and long life are generally the cauſes or occaſions of pleaſure; ſuch as the nature of the ſoil, and the temperature of the air not ſubject to the extreams of cold or heat, of dryneſs or moiſture. The very breathing in a good air, and living under a calm and ſerene ſky is a refreſhment, and conveys an inexpreſſible gladneſs to the heart; the plants and flowers are more fragrant, and the fruits have a better taſte and flavour. But what if there be not ſo great a fertility, as poſſibly there may not? why even then if there be a ſufficient plenty, and that of the beſt, ſo that what may ſeem to be wanting in a groſs luxuriancy is more than made up in goodneſs, it cannot be ſaid that ſuch perſons inherit leſs of God's earthly bleſſings than others. Agreeable to this is the deſcription which an ingenious * *Author* gives of *Aſia the Leſs*; "A tract of ground," ſaith he, "which for the temperature of "the

* *Enquiry into the life and writings of* Homer. § 1. p. 15.

" the climate and qualities of the ſoil may " vie with any in *Europe*. It is not ſo fat " and fruitful as the plains of *Babylon* or " banks of *Nile*, but the purity and benig- " nity of the air, the varieties of the fruits " and fields, the beauty and number of the " rivers, and the conſtant gales from the " happy iſles of the *Weſtern Sea*, all con- " ſpire to bring its productions of every " kind to the higheſt perfection; they in- " ſpire that mildneſs of temper and flow of " fancy which favour the moſt extenſive " views, and give the fineſt conceptions of " *nature* and *truth*.". Nor is there any reaſon that I can ſee to imagine, that the earth did not yield a large increaſe before the Flood, enough to ſupply the appetites and deſires of that ungodly race of men even to luxury. The *pleaſant* as well as *long* life of thoſe firſt mortals is the moſt obvious and natural account that can be given of their uncommon degeneracy of manners; [g] *living in pleaſure they were dead while they lived*; forgot God and themſelves and a life to come, being wholly immerſed in ſenſuality and voluptuouſneſs; which was no ſign of the earth's, or the inhabitants of the earth's feeling the weight of the *firſt* curſe more than we do now. And if it be true (as it is highly probable, and the general opinion of

[g] 1 Tim. v. 6.

of learned men) that *fleſh was not eaten before the flood*, it muſt argue the fruits and vegitable productions of the earth to be much more delicious and nouriſhing than they are at preſent; ſince otherwiſe the temptation to venture upon *animal* food would have been ſo great, that perſons unreſtrained by conſcience and religion would not have been able to reſiſt it. This ſhows that the earth after the Flood cannot reaſonably be ſuppoſed ſo delightful a place as before; and much more that it cannot rival the delights of *Paradiſe*, or thoſe which any other part of the earth inhabited by innocent creatures would have furniſhed. We muſt have a very low notion of the *paradiſiacal* ſtate of the world if we think it did not exceed its preſent condition. What ſort of a place *Paradiſe* was we may gueſs from hence, that the happineſs of the next life (at leaſt in the intermediate ſtate between death and the reſurrection) is repreſented under this name in *ſcripture*, *Luke* xxiii. 43. where in anſwer to the penitent thief who prayed Chriſt to *remember him when he was come into his kingdom*, hereby declaring his belief that he was the promiſed *Meſſiah*, our Saviour tells him, *Verily I ſay unto thee, to day ſhalt thou be with me in Paradiſe*. So St. [g] *Paul* ſaith of himſelf, that he *was caught up into Paradiſe*; and in

[g] 2 Cor. xii. 4.

in the *Revelations*, chap. ii. 7. there is a promiſe made *to him that overcometh, that he ſhould eat of the tree of life which is in the midſt of the Paradiſe of God.* Now I believe there is no one but will allow the place here deſigned under the reſemblance of *Paradiſe*, to ſignify a ſtate of *very great* happineſs; even ſuch as has nothing like to it in our world: and conſequently that *Paradiſe* muſt have been very different from any part of our earth, when it has the honour to lend its name to this bleſſed place. And if it be ſaid that the *common* earth even *then* was not equal to *Paradiſe*; I acknowledge this to be very true. But then it cannot be ſuppoſed, that the difference was any thing nigh ſo great as between *Paradiſe* and the earth that *now* is, when we conſider; that in caſe the ſtate of innocence had continued, *Paradiſe* would ſoon have been too narrow to contain the growing numbers of mankind, who muſt therefore have been tranſplanted into other regions of the earth better fitted to receive them than the preſent earth is; leſt the compariſon between *Paradiſe*, their firſt abode, and that to which they afterwards removed, ſhould render them leſs pleaſed with their new habitation. And perhaps, ſome will reckon it probable, that if *Paradiſe* had ſo vaſtly ſurpaſs'd the *primitive* earth as it does the *preſent*, God would have

inflicted no other punishment upon our first parents before the sentence of death took place, besides expulsion from thence; without *cursing the earth*, the place of their banishment; since without any such additional curse it might very well have been said to *Adam*, [i] *In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life*; (for how could he do otherwise remembring *Paradise*) *thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee*; *in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground.* For is not this the true state of the earth, and the lot of mankind, even now that the curse (according to this opinion) is removed? And how then was it the effect of that curse? What has been said does, I think, show it to be highly probable, that the earth now is both *less healthful* and *less delightful* than it was before the *fall*, or even before the *flood*; and consequently that no part of the original curse upon the ground was removed after the deluge.

To strengthen this reasoning, there are *two* considerations more taken from the *relation* between the *natural* and the *moral* world; or between the state of the earth and the present degenerate state of mankind; one of which will better suit the other

[i] Gen. iii. 17.

other according to the *old* hypothesis, than the *new*. For,

1. WE are to consider, that the world now not being the *abode of innocence* as at first, but of *guilt*, it can hardly be thought the face of external nature is exactly the same now as it was then. As soon as *sin* came into the world a *curse* followed; and what room is there to imagine that the *curse* is removed while *sin* continues to reign? Had the first descendants of fallen man taken warning from the punishment of the original pair, so as to have stood in awe of the righteous judgments of God, and not sinned against him; it is not unlikely that the curse thus answering its end would have been abated, if not removed: but instead of learning righteousness and goodness from the dispensations of Providence, this first race of mortals sunk deeper and deeper into vice, till their case at length became so desperate as to call for an universal destruction. And as God without doubt foresaw what the world would prove after the flood, it would be difficult to give an account why the earth should be fitted up in the same manner, as if it had been to receive a race of innocent creatures. No, before the sentence is mitigated, and much more before it is reversed, let some trial be made how they will behave; and if it prove to

be a *new earth wherein dwelleth righteouſneſs*, it will be then time enough for the Judge of the whole earth, in conſideration of the *inhabitants* being reformed and grown better, to make the *place* of their habitation better too. But why the curſe which was inflicted for ſin ſhould be taken off while ſin kept its ground; or why the *effect* ſhould ceaſe the *cauſe* remaining in its full force, it will not, I doubt, be eaſy to give a ſatisfactory reaſon. It muſt be own'd, this conſideration taken from the *ſinfulneſs* of the human race will only hold againſt the *entire removal* of the primitive curſe, not againſt its being *in part removed*, ſo as that mankind after the Flood ſhould be in a better condition than they were before, not being ſo extremely and univerſally wicked. But there is another thing which perhaps will prove the expediency of putting the earth into a *worſe* condition after the flood inſtead of a *better*; and that is,

2. To prevent mankind's relapſing into the ſame deplorable ſtate of vice and wickedneſs, as that which occaſioned this extraordinary act of divine vengeance. Not only *Paradiſe* but the *other* earth was too tempting and dangerous a place for man to live in, after his paſſions were fired, particularly his love of ſenſual pleaſure, by eating of the *forbidden fruit*. The *earth* was therefore

fore *curſed*, which, all things conſidered, was an inſtance of *mercy* as well as of *judgment*. But it looks as if the alteration the *curſe* produced in the earth was not ſo great, but that the temptations ariſing from the delights which ſtill remained were too many and too powerful for mankind eaſily to conquer; this, as I obſerved before, being the moſt likely account of the extreme corruption of the *antediluvian* world. God was therefore graciouſly pleaſed to leſſen this temptation which had proved ſo fatal to thoſe who lived before the flood; that ſo not finding any thing in this world to make us think it our *final* happineſs, we might be the ſooner induced to turn our thoughts towards another world, and ſeriouſly and effectually to prepare for that. The *wiſdom* and *goodneſs* of divine Providence in this view ſeem to be more conſpicuous. And tho' it be no ſafe way of arguing, this or that method *ſeems to us* wiſeſt and beſt, therefore *it is* the very method which God has taken, becauſe we may be miſtaken in our judgment; yet when the matter of *fact* concerning the paſt diſpenſations of Providence, or that God has proceeded in this or another way with mankind, is made probable from other conſiderations, then that ſuch a way does likewiſe anſwer wiſer ends and purpoſes according to our notions

of things does reaſonably ſtrengthen the perſuaſion we before had of our being in the right.

BUT as you may be willing to know the arguments produced for this ſingular notion, of the removal of the curſe after the flood, I ſhall briefly examine one or two of the moſt conſiderable. The principal foundation upon which this notion reſts is, that paſſage, *Gen.* v. 29. where it is recorded, that *Lamech* having a ſon born to him, *called his name Noah, ſaying, this ſame ſhall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, becauſe of the ground which the Lord has curſed.* That is, ſays an ingenious writer, " This is the *ſeed of the woman*, the heir " of the promiſe, who ſhould be the in- " ſtrument deſtin'd by Providence to eaſe " us of our burdens. The ancient Expec- " tation was not that the world ſhould be " delivered all at once from the whole curſe " of the fall. *Lamech*, who ſo well re- " membred the *leſs* curſe upon the ground, " cannot be ſuppoſed to forget the *greater* " curſe upon man. *Duſt thou art, and to duſt " thou ſhalt return:* and yet from this part " of the curſe he gives no hope of a de- " liverance. *Noah* was not that ſeed who " ſhould *bring life and immortality to light.* " Of *Noah*, his father foretels, that he " ſhould ſave them from the labour and

" toil

" toil of their hands, *i. e.* by the removal " of the *curſe* on the *ground*." Were the argument here as ſolid as the imagination is ingenious, I ſhould deſpair of being able to anſwer it; but I muſt own I cannot ſee where the argument lies. There appears no ground in Scripture for this pretended expectation of deliverance from the *curſe* on the *ground*, and the *curſe* on *man* at different times, and by different perſons; nor can it be proved that there was any ſuch expectation. *Lamech* lived not to ſee the happy time (if there was any ſuch) when the earth was to be diſburthened of the curſe which fell ſo heavy upon it; and how then, ſpeaking by a prophetic ſpirit, could he ſay, *this ſame ſhall comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands?* Would this expreſſion have been proper, if the thing meant had been that *ſix hundred years* after, when he, and all that generation of men ſhould be extinct, the earth ſhould put on a new face? Do not the words plainly intimate his hope, that as his ſon grew up to the ſtature, and ſtrength, and underſtanding of a man, he would take off a great part of that trouble which he now had in cultivating the earth? and it was natural enough for him in the joy of his heart at the birth of his firſt ſon, a promiſing child, to enter-

tain ſuch a hope as this, and to uſe ſuch language, tho' no way mov'd to it by a *ſpirit of propheſy* — But it is farther urged, " that the flood being over, God declares, " *I will not again curſe the ground any more* " *for man's ſake*; from which declaration " it appears, that as the flood was the ef- " fect of the curſe denounced againſt the " earth for man's ſake, ſo the old curſe " was now executed and accompliſh'd " in the flood; in conſequence of which " diſcharge from the curſe a new bleſſing " is immediately pronounced upon the " earth." To this I anſwer, that ſince God's *curſing* the ground after the *fall* can only ſignify his putting it into a *worſe* condition than that it was in before; it is natural to underſtand the declaration, that he *would not again curſe the ground*, as meaning no more than this, that things ſhould continue in the ſtate in which he now ſettled them, he being determined not to blaſt the face of nature with a *ſecond* curſe. And in this ſenſe the words may have their full accompliſhment, tho' by means of the change which the deluge had made in the earth, it was far from being ſo agreeable a dwelling as before the flood, and much more before the fall in its *paradiſiacal* ſtate. " But does " not *Noah*'s planting a vineyard juſt after " the

" the flood intimate the great barrenneſs " of the ground before the flood, and the " proſpect he had of its greater fertility " now?" Not at all, but rather the contrary, ſince it may be ſuppoſed that the earth then was plentifully ſtock'd with vines and other fruit-trees; whereas now that the flood had laid waſte every thing, and *Noah* found that vines did not ſpring up ſpontaneouſly out of the earth, or that the grapes were not of a generous kind, there was a neceſſity of his planting vines, if he intended to have wine, and that truly good. " But " how comes it that no mention is made " of vines before the flood, while the ſa- " cred hiſtorian takes ſuch particular notice " of *Noah*'s planting a vineyard after- " ward?" To this it may be anſwer'd, that there was a *particular occaſion* for this *particular notice* at that time, *viz.* in order to introduce the hiſtory of *Noah*'s drunkenneſs, which was attended with very important conſequences; and that without this or ſome other like occaſion, there would have been no more ſaid about vineyards after the flood than before, in a hiſtory ſo ſhort as that of *Geneſis*, which comprehends the account of two thouſand years (for ſo long and ſomewhat longer was it from the *creation* to the time of *Abraham*) in the ſpace of a few pages. Nor does *Noah*'s drunkenneſs neceſſarily

ceſſarily argue his being ignorant of the nature of wine; ſince another reaſon may be given of it, his not being ſo much upon his guard as he ought to have been, or not ſo well able to bear the ſtrength of the liquor: as either of theſe might proceed from his having been probably for ſeveral years without the uſe of wine. The joy of the firſt vintage, the firſt after the world's *reſtoration*, was the greater upon this account, and tempted the *Patriarch* to drink more largely than he had ever done before; when for want of being accuſtomed to it for ſome time, or perhaps through bodily weakneſs, he was not qualified to drink ſo much.

LET us make two reflections on what has been offered:

1. SEE here the kind concern which God has expreſs'd for our *ſouls*, in ſo ordering things by his wiſe providence, that the earth ſhould be *leſs delightful* than it had been, that it might be the *leſs inſnaring*. The *ſoul* being the principal part of Man the happineſs of the *ſoul* is chiefly to be minded, and the dangers to which 'tis liable are chiefly to be guarded againſt. Now the *ſoul* is by nothing ſo much endangered as by the paſſions and appetites of the body, when they are awakned and inflamed by ſenſual indulgencies and delights. Theſe draw the ſoul off from minding its own happineſs, and are too often

often mistaken for it. So that we have reason to be thankful that our temptations are no greater on this side. It is really happy for mankind that they are doomed to labour and travel, and that their pleasures here have a great many disagreeable mixtures. Were it not for this, how soon would the soul be melted down into a life of sense? We see how it is now with those who live at their ease, and have opportunities of gratifying the flesh with its affections and lusts. Like [k] *Solomon, whatsoever their eyes desire they keep not from them, and with-hold not their heart from any joy.* They give themselves up to an indolent and voluptuous life. This is too generally the character of men of wealth and fortune; and upon this account they have a great deal of reason to be reconciled to their condition whose circumstances will not allow them to take those full intoxicating draughts of pleasure which some do. God is kinder to them herein than they commonly apprehend. Let us take the hint, or rather let us follow so plain an admonition, and reflect, that this world is not our home, nor the earth our portion, unless we chuse it for such to the neglect of a heavenly country. And let this reflection cure us of our fondness for this life and the things of it, and ingage us [l] *by patient*

[k] Eccles. ii. 10. [l] Rom. ii. 7.

patient continuance in well doing to seek for glory and honour and immortality.

2. LET us observe with thankfulness that God has not neglected making any necessary provision for our *bodies.* [m] *The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof, the world, and all that dwell therein.* The earth even now has its *fulness*, sufficient to answer the *real needs* of all mankind, and under the management of temperance and industry to supply them with every sort of conveniences too. God gives us as much as suits the present frame of our nature, which he knows perfectly well, and a state of probation for another life, Let us gratefully acknowledge his gifts, and use them with a wise sobriety and generous liberality according as God shall enable us, and then we shall not want any thing necessary to our real happiness, but certainly enjoy that portion which God sees to be best for us, and find [n] *all things* (prosperity and adversity, health and sickness, pleasure and pain, success and disappointment) *to work together for our good* in the last and most important result. I would not be understood by any thing I have before said, to assert, that the *antediluvians* had the better of us in every thing, even as to the *present* life. In the serenity of the air, the equality of the seasons,

[m] Psal. xxiv. 1. [n] Rom. viii. 28.

ſons, and the nobler, more wholſome and better concocted juices yielded by the fruits of the earth, it is very probable they excelled us. But then if we conſider the great *improvements* which have been made in the ſeveral arts and profeſſions of life ſince that time, particularly as to *clothing* the body, *building* of houſes, and *cultivating* the land, all which tend very much to the more comfortable accommodation of human life, we ſhall be ſenſible that the difference is not ſo great between them and us, as to preſent enjoyment, as it may on firſt ſight appear. The *ſcripture* hiſtory indeed will not ſuffer us to think, that the lives of the firſt men were ſo unprovided upon all theſe accounts as ſome *heathen* authors have repreſented them, and not without reaſon, if their notion were true; that men, and other animals ſprung at firſt out of the earth, as it were by *chance*, without the care or intereſt of *Providence* in their production or conſervation. No wonder if ſuch friendleſs beings, deſtitute of all thoſe helps and coveniencies in the midſt of which we are brought forth into the world, did many of them periſh with hunger and cold, and by numberleſs unavoidable accidents. But from the [o] *ſacred records* we know, that mankind were never in ſuch a forlorn condition as this, that they were

[o] Gen. iv. 21, 22.

were the charge of Providence from the very beginning; and that not only the neceſſary arts of life, but ſuch as are ſubſervient to pleaſure were not unknown before the flood. However ſtill there is no reaſon to think, that they equalled us in reſpect of many things, which are conſiderable helps to the paſſing life both more ſecurely and more commodiouſly. Let us not therefore be unthankful for the advantages we enjoy under the care of divine Providence, influencing and bleſſing the endeavours and inventions of mankind; at the ſame time remembring, that all theſe things are of ſmall importance, in compariſon with thoſe which regard our everlaſting ſtate, as to which our condition is unſpeakably better than theirs who lived in the firſt ages of the world, or in any time before our Saviour, or who live now where the goſpel is unknown.

Let this ſuffice for the firſt obſervation on the text. The

II^d. Proposition, The decree or purpoſe of God to preſerve the earth in the ſtate into which he put it after the flood, as long as the earth itſelf ſhould endure, I ſhall conſider in the next diſcourſe.

SER-

SERMON VII.

Of God's covenant with *Noah* after the flood.

GEN. viii. 21, 22.

——*And the Lord said in his heart I will not, again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth: neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold, and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*

IN a preceding discourse I observ'd that the words led us to consider these *two* things:

I. GOD's renewing the face of the earth after the deluge, and making it fit to be inhabited as before: this is plainly implied

implied in the words—on this I have discourſed; and,

II. HIS decree or purpoſe to preſerve the earth in the ſtate into which he now put it, as long as the earth itſelf ſhould continue.—Of this I am now to treat. And it may be proper to conſider the ſeveral parts of this decree in the order in which they are placed in the text.

1. THE *firſt* thing determined is, *I will not again curſe the ground any more for man's ſake.* This I apprehend refers to the firſt curſe on the ground, for the diſobedience of man in eating the *forbidden fruit.* Within the period or time of the old world there were two remarkable and univerſal changes which happen'd to the earth, both by way of judgment; the former, the curſe brought upon it by the ſin of *Adam*; the latter, the utter deſolation by the flood, occaſioned by the monſtrous wickedneſs of the antediluvian race, when *God ſmote every living thing.* Now it was decreed that in the new world, which had its beginning from the flood, the vengeance of heaven ſhould never be diſplay'd after this manner: God would neither *curſe the ground* as he did immediately after the fall, nor *deſtroy every living thing upon it* as he did at the time of the deluge. And there is this farther reaſon for thinking that

that the deluge is not referred to in the firſt part of the decree, when *God ſaith that he will not any more curſe the ground*; that the deluge is never expreſs'd after this manner: whereas almoſt the very ſame words are to be met with in the ſentence pronounced for the firſt ſin, [a] *curſed is the ground for thy ſake*: to which how exactly doth the text anſwer, *I will not again curſe the ground any more for man's ſake?* A plain indication that one of theſe relates to the other. The firſt curſe conſiſted in the earth's being render'd leſs fit for the uſe of man than it was before; by which means at the ſame time that there was an *abatement* in his *pleaſure*, his *labour* was *increaſed*, chiefly by the neceſſity he was now under of being at endleſs trouble in freeing the earth from thoſe thorns and thiſtles, and probably other weeds and noxious plants, which from this time ſprung up in ſuch abundance. This would frequently oblige him to *eat bread in the ſweat of his face*, in which there was really a *ſecret* bleſſing mingled with the curſe, and is ſo ſtill; there being none who have generally more health, and of conſequence a truer enjoyment of life than thoſe, who either neceſſarily or voluntarily employ themſelves in ſome bodily labour even to *ſweating*. No better friend to health than labour and exerciſe, nor more

[a] Gen. iii. 17.

uſeful preſervative againſt thoſe vices which too commonly grow out of eaſe and idleneſs. This is reaſon enough for permitting the firſt curſe upon the ground to continue. But then there is aſſurance given us that no *farther* curſe ſhall be inflicted. The earth's *ſecond* period begins with a bleſſing as the *firſt* did, tho' it does not begin ſo happily; to make amends for which it ſhall be ſecure from being curſed as the firſt was. We may very well ſay that God delighteth not in curſing, but contrary-wiſe in bleſſing. This is the moſt natural exerciſe of infinite Goodneſs. We indeed read of [b] *mens being curſed in the city and in the field, in their baſket and in their ſtore; the fruit of their body, the fruit of their land, the increaſe of their kine, and the flocks of their ſheep, in their coming in and their going out.* But then as theſe are curſes relating only to *particular* perſons, not to *all* mankind, to ſome ſmall parts of the earth not to all; ſo it is only when men *refuſe to hearken to the voice of the Lord their God, to obſerve to do all his commandments and his ſtatutes* which he has made known to them in his word, and by the voice of their own conſciences; when inſtead of remembring God to honour and obey him, they go on multiplying their tranſgreſſions againſt him; 'tis only in this caſe that all theſe

[b] Deut. xxviii. 15—19.

theſe curſes come upon them. Otherwiſe as God will not curſe the earth in general, ſo nor the portion of particular perſons. For tho' the good man may not always proſper in temporals, even when he is moſt obſervant of his duty, tho' *his houſe may not be ſo with God* as he could wiſh, and the earth may with-hold its increaſe; yet, take notice, none of theſe things to him are in the nature of a *curſe*, being no arguments of the diſpleaſure of God againſt him, nor intended ſo properly to *puniſh* ſin as to *prevent* it, and to *try* and *improve* his virtues. Indeed as to all thoſe who have an intereſt in the *ſecond Adam* by a living faith and love unfeigned, we may be allowed to ſay, that they are not only ſafe from any additional curſe while they continue in their uprightneſs, but are in ſome ſenſe entirely diſcharged from the original curſe inflicted for the ſin of the *firſt Adam*; I mean from the *malignity* of that curſe, tho' not from the *external* effects of it. *They are bleſſed of God*, and in conſequence of that *all things are bleſſed to them.* Tho' their portion is not in itſelf ſo comfortable, as it would have been in the *paradiſiacal* earth, yet it has no curſe, no evil appendage annexed to it. Their covenant right to it, and the enjoyment which [c] *through the gift of God* they

[c] Eccleſ. iii. 13.

have of it, makes it better than an abode in *Paradiſe* could have been without the *ſpecial* favour of the Almighty. In the greateſt ſtraits they have not barely a ſufficiency, but can ſay that [d] *all things are theirs, becauſe they are Chriſt's, and Chriſt is God's.* And, which is yet more reviving to think of, they know there is a ſtate remaining for the people of God, [e] *when there ſhall be no more curſe*, i. e. when every unhappy conſequence of the fall ſhall ceaſe; when the curſe upon man, by which he loſt immortality, and that upon his outward enjoyments and poſſeſſions, by means whereof leſs comfort and happineſs is to be extracted from them, ſhall be removed together; and both he himſelf, and his condition, ſhall be made as perfect as they can be, and ſo continue for ever. Which, by the way, ſeems to overthrow that fancy of a *learned man* mentioned before, that theſe *two* curſes, one upon *man*, the other upon the *ground*, were to be removed at *different* times, and by *different* perſons; ſince it is only of the next world, when all the righteous ſhall put on immortality, that it is ſaid, *there ſhall be no more curſe.* Whatever effect the firſt curſe had ſhall then be done away, and not till then. Now indeed we are ſure that *God will not again curſe the ground any more*; by

[d] 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23. [e] Revel. xxii. 3.

by which is meant, that there ſhall be no *new* curſe, not that the earth ſhall be as delightful and commodious an abode as it was before the fall; this cannot be expected. And no great matter tho' it cannot, ſince we have the proſpect of a ſtate ſo much exceeding in happineſs even that of innocence itſelf; this latter falling as far ſhort of it as innocence does of perfection.—So much for the firſt part of the words, *The decree of God not to curſe the ground any more for man's ſake.*

2. IT is added next, *for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.* It is very ſtrange doctrine which has been built upon this paſſage of Scripture, compared with another which ſounds ſomewhat like it, concerning the *ſovereignty* of God; as if (inſtead of being the *ſovereignty* of a moſt wiſe, and holy, and gracious Being, who does indeed [f] *whatſoever he pleaſes in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth here below*; but whom nothing pleaſes or can pleaſe, excepting that which infinite *wiſdom* approves, and is conſonant to infinite *holineſs and goodneſs*) it conſiſted in God's acting without all regard to the nature and reaſon of things, making the very ſame thing to be a reaſon for his doing an action, and for his not doing it; not becauſe

[f] Dan. iv. 35.

the circumſtances are different, but becauſe he will. God's bringing a flood upon the earth, by which the whole world was very nigh deſtroy'd, and this not many hundred years after it was created, was ſo aſtoniſhing an event, that the *ſacred* hiſtorian thought proper to give the reaſon of it; *viz.* [g] that *the wickedneſs of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* Now becauſe there is ſome reſemblance between theſe words and thoſe in the text, *the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth*, which according to our tranſlation is aſſigned as the ground of God's determining to curſe the earth no more, a *certain author* haſtily concludes, that 'tis the glory of God to act as an *abſolute* ſovereign, ordering things in the courſe of his Providence after this or a contrary manner, not becauſe his *wiſdom*, or *juſtice*, or *goodneſs* direct to it as beſt, but merely becauſe he ſhall ſhow his *irreſiſtible power* herein, of which the caſe before us is, he thinks, an inſtance; the *wickedneſs* of man being the reaſon of his drowning the earth, and of his purpoſing not to puniſh it any more after the ſame manner, only becauſe he was minded it ſhould be ſo. It muſt be own'd here is ſome difficulty, but none as I apprehend

[g] Gen. vi. 5.

prehend that is insuperable, or that we had not much better leave in its full force, than have recourse to such a solution. For if God proceeded in this matter by *absolute sovereignty*, the *wickedness* of man was not the real cause of the flood, but *mere will and pleasure*, contrary to the express declaration of scripture: and if it be said, that making the *wickedness* of man a reason for not cursing the ground after the flood might be to shew his *sovereignty*, tho' the former was the effect of vindictive justice, the answer is easy; that the *wickedness* of man would not then be the true reason, but the *sovereignty* of God notwithstanding that *wickedness*, and that therefore one as well as the other is to be resolved into the *wisdom* of God as the supreme Governour of the world; that wisdom which never proceeds but upon the best reasons, whether we are capable of judging of the goodness of these reasons or no. This then would be answer sufficient; to which we may add *two* observations which quite overturn the foundation of this notable reasoning. The *first* is, that the *hebrew* particle which we translate *for*, is sometimes rendred *although*, and ought to have been so rendred here, if the before-mentioned absurdity was no other way to be avoided. *Although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.* This

ſhall not hinder me from doing them good, nor alter the thoughts of mercy which I have purpoſed towards them. The *other* obſervation is, that theſe two paſſages, when carefully examined, are not ſo very much alike as they are commonly thought to be. Let us briefly compare them. EVERY *imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil* CONTINUALLY. So it is deſcrib'd in the vi^th of *Geneſis*; *The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth*; ſo it is in the text. And don't you upon the bare hearing theſe two paſſages readily diſcern a difference? In the former 'tis *every imagination*, in the latter the word *every* is omitted; in the former it is *only evil*, in the latter without the word *only*; in the former it is added, *continually*, which is not in the latter. In the latter paſſage there is one expreſſion which is not in the former, and that is *from his youth* or earlieſt life; but this concurs with the reſt, to ſhew the different meaning of the two paſſages; *one* of which ſpeaks of the *great wickedneſs* of mankind before the flood, their *habitual corruption*, and this grown to ſuch an enormous height thro' long cuſtom in ſinning, that their caſe was become deſperate and incurable, which was the reaſon of God's extirpating the whole race with the exception of eight perſons; the *other* mentions only the

the *early proneneſs* there is in mankind to go aſtray, without any of thoſe aggravating terms which are uſed in the firſt caſe. This being premiſed, I ſhall now proceed to a more diſtinct conſideration of the connection which theſe words, *for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth*, have with the other parts of the text. They may either relate only to the preceding words, *I will not again curſe the ground any more for man's ſake*, or to thoſe alſo which follow. I ſhall conſider them in their relation to the former part of the verſe, to which I am inclined to think they peculiarly refer, coming in immediately after, and thereby ſeparating between *God's curſing the ground*, and *ſmiting every living thing*. God curſed the ground at firſt for *Adam*'s ſake; here it is ſaid, that he would not any more curſe it for *man*'s ſake; the reaſon of which is added, *for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth*. As much as to ſay, "*Allowance* is "to be made for the *preſent* weakneſs and "diſorder of human nature, and thoſe "ſtrong inclinations and deſires after *ſen-* "*ſual* good, by which men are very early "tempted to forget God and tranſgreſs his "commandments." This reaſon for God's *not curſing* the ground after the *flood*, ſeems to be ſecretly oppoſed to the reaſon of his *curſing* it after the *fall*. God curſed the earth

earth for *Adam*'s ſake, becauſe tho' he was created with a ripeneſs and rectitude in all his faculties, and placed in a garden of delights, he yet diſobeyed a plain and eaſy command of his maker and benefactor: This greatly aggravated the guilt of his firſt tranſgreſſion. His nature was *perfectly* ſound, his affections regular, and conſequently his judgment unperverted. So that for him not to hearken to the voice of God out of whoſe hands he ſo lately came, and in ſuch a ſtate of moral ſoundneſs, was utterly inexcuſable. But, alas! the conſtitution we are born with, and the circumſtances in which we are bred and educated, are far from being ſo advantageous; our paſſions get looſe and range after a variety of objects, fixing where they ought not, and growing headſtrong and impetuous before we have ſtrength of reaſon to direct and govern them; to which may be added the many bad examples with which we are continually ſurrounded from the very firſt dawn of reaſon: ſo that it is no wonder if *the imagination of our heart is evil from our youth*, that is, if our affections are very ſoon ingaged by preſent ſenſible things; and, miſtaking theſe for our felicity, we too commonly neglect the purſuit of that which is truly ſuch. God [h] *who knoweth our frame and remembreth that we are but duſt* in other reſpects beſides that of our *mortality*, who is acquainted

[h] Pſal. ciii. 14.

acquainted with all our infirmities, the imperfection of our reaſonable powers, the ſtrength of our paſſions, the numerouſneſs and violence of temptations; has compaſſion upon us, and is ready to make all the gracious abatements which we need and our caſe will bear. This he ſhews in his readineſs to forgive us all our ſins upon our ſincere repentance, kindly offering us his aſſiſtance to enable us to do all that he requires of us, and rewarding our ſincere tho' very imperfect obedience with eternal life. The original of all this is his gracious goodneſs, which pities the frailties of mankind. And the ſame tender compaſſion we diſcover in theſe words, *I will not again curſe the ground any more for man's ſake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.* I will conſider man as he is in his preſent low eſtate, and expect no more from him than in this ſtate, with all the diſadvantages of it, he is able to perform. This is ſo far from being an argument for continuing in ſin, that it is one of the moſt powerful motives which can be to ingage every one of an ingenuous mind to hate ſin, and to love God and his duty, that he may walk worthy of ſo much goodneſs. Who that reflects and conſiders things as he ought, but muſt reſolve to deny himſelf and croſs his irregular appetites, whatever pains it may coſt him

to

to do ſo, when God is ſo very ready to overlook and forgive thoſe failings to which he is liable, by means of thoſe appetites, to give him ſtrength to counter-act them, and will ſo glorioufly recompence his reſiſtance of and victories over them?

3. THE next clauſe to be conſidered is, *neither will I again ſmite any more every living thing as I have done*, meaning by the flood; when, according to the relation of that matter in the ſacred hiſtory, [i] *all fleſh that moved upon the earth, fowl and cattle, and beaſt, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man; all in whoſe noſtrils was the breath of life, of all that was on the dry land died: every living ſubſtance was deſtroyed from the earth, and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark*, by whom the earth was to be again repleniſh'd. And that there might be no apprehenſion of a ſecond flood, God not only *determined within himſelf* never more to ſmite every living thing in that manner, but [k] *eſtabliſhed his covenant with Noah and his ſeed after him, and with every living creature that was with him, that all fleſh ſhould not be cut off any more by the waters of a flood, ſetting his bow in the cloud for a token of the covenant between him and the earth:* that as often as they ſaw this *bow*,

[i] Gen. vii. 21.— [k] Gen. ix. 9.—

bow, they might call to remembrance God's ſolemn promiſe and irreverſible decree not to lay waſte the earth with ſuch a ſweeping judgment any more. He might by inunda tions, or partial deluges, deſtroy the inhabitants of particular places and countries; this he might judge neceſſary in his providential government of the world: but this would not be *ſmiting every living thing* as in the flood, On the contrary, the lives deſtroyed on ſuch extraordinary occaſions would bear no proportion to the great body of mankind, the loſs ſuſtain'd would hardly be ſenſible. It is farther certain, that every thing which has breath muſt in a longer or ſhorter time reſign that breath and die, *time* and *death* are *univerſal conquerors*; but then their conqueſts are *gradual*, ſo as to be leſs diſcernible. As one generation paſſeth away, another cometh and filleth up their room, in much the ſame manner as it is in the ranks of a battle, by which means the number of men upon the earth is kept intire, and rather increaſed than leſſened. Whereas in the univerſal deluge the breath of every living thing was extinguiſhed at once, root and branch, parents and children, old and young, not only ſome of each ſort but all, were together carried away into eternity without diſtinction, without any exception more than of eight perſons. But no ſuch over-flowing

ſcourge

ſcourge ſhall paſs thro' the earth any more. The Lord ſtay'd his hand, and ſaid *it is enough*. *One* ſuch deſolation is enough for an example of the *dependence* of all things upon God, and as an *earneſt* of the final puniſhment of all ungodly impenitent ſinners.

1. THAT *one* deluge in which God ſmote every living thing is example ſufficient, to thoſe who rightly conſider it, of the *dependence* of all things upon him as his creatures, and the objects of his conſtant providential care. There is no room for ſetting up blind and unconſcious *nature* as a proper cauſe or principle of things, independent of the will and over-ruling agency of a wiſe and all-powerful Deity. There is what we call the natural courſe and order of things, but this was not ſettled at firſt, nor is it ſtill continued by *nature* itſelf (which is a mere name taken apart from the things themſelves) but *by God*. *Nature* cannot alter its own courſe; *nature* could not cover the earth with the waters of a flood, much leſs remove them again. All the powers of *natural* cauſes are not equal to this effect; which is alike * *unqueſtionable* from the monuments of it ſtill remaining, and *unaccountable* without having recourſe to the *miracu-*

* *See* Ray's Phyſic. Theol. Diſc. D. 2. *and* Revelat. Examined. Diſſ. 11—14.

miraculous interpoſition of a ſupreme Being, who having made the world by his almighty power, and by the ſame power ſtill preſerving it, can when he pleaſes, deſtroy it, and then repair and renew it again. Nay were it not for his univerſal Providence ſuſtaining and enlivening the whole frame of nature, there would be no ſuch thing as a living creature upon the earth, but all would be one dead, unanimated, unſhapen maſs. [l] *He giveth to all life and breath and all things*; it is not to *nature*, but to his *viſitation*, who is the author and preſerver of nature, that they owe their continuance in life, and every thing belonging to it. [m] *The eyes of all wait upon him, and he giveth them their food in due ſeaſon: wherefore let every thing that has breath praiſe the Lord.*

2. THAT *one* univerſal deluge was ſufficient as an *earneſt* of the final puniſhment of all ungodly impenitent ſinners. Notwithſtanding the judgments of God which are abroad in the earth, too many will not be perſuaded to learn righteouſneſs, becauſe they think they may eſcape without it. All wicked men are not puniſhed, take them all together, the number of thoſe who eſcape and even proſper in the world is much greater than of thoſe who *remarkably* ſuffer; which tempts them to think, that it

[l] Acts xvii. 25. [m] Pſal. cxlv. 15. cl. 6.

it is not so much the effect of the *divine* displeasure, as the natural result of *second* causes that any suffer: from whence they conclude that they are safe in a course of sin, having nothing to fear either here or hereafter. But now what will they say to this instance of the impartial judgment of God, the deluge of *Noah*, when a whole world of sinners were punished with utter destruction, none escaping? And what is this but an *example* of that vengeance which shall overtake all the wicked of the earth at last, [n] *for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever?* Of which grand catastrophe, *Enoch also, the seventh from Adam*, and who was translated before the flood, *prophesied saying, Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly amongst them of all their ungodly deeds, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.* This prophecy of *Enoch* was partly accomplished in the deluge, but has a farther reference to a greater event prefigured by the former, even to the final overthrow of all the enemies of God, not those of one generation only as in the flood, but of all who have lived from the beginning of the world, and died as they lived; none of these, whatever prosperity might

[n] Jude, *ver.* 13, 14, 15.

might attend them while they were in the world, and how peaceably ſoever they might be permitted to depart out of it, are withdrawn out of the notice of God's eye, or the reach of his arm. He will fetch them all back again, their ſouls from the manſions of ſeparate ſpirits, and their bodies from the grave, and conſume them all together as one univerſal ſacrifice to his juſtice. Of this the general deluge was a ſure and melancholy *earneſt*; and being abundantly ſufficient for that purpoſe as a warning to thoſe who read *too flee from the wrath to come*; there was no occaſion that God upon any ſuch account ſhould again ſmite every living thing as he had done.

4. THE decree concludes with theſe words, *while the earth remaineth ſeed-time and harveſt, and cold and heat, and ſummer and winter, and day and night ſhall not ceaſe.* Not that any ſuch thing as this had happened before the flood, to which time thoſe words are by ſome made to look back. For, whatever irregularity be ſuppos'd in the ſeaſons during that period, can it be ſaid with tolerable propriety, that *ſeed-time and harveſt, night and day had then ceaſed?* Muſt not the human race have ceas'd with them? But now heaven and earth being as it were, or in appearance, mingled together in the deluge, there was a kind of ceſſation of all

 theſe,

theſe, an interruption in the courſe of nature; all things were blended as in a chaos. To which may be added, that this mode of expreſſion might be us'd with regard to the forlorn face of nature at that time; as unpromiſing as the earth look'd upon the retiring of the waters from it, God intended that it ſhould again be inhabited, and that there ſhould be a regular ſucceſſion of the ſeaſons as before. Here and there this regularity may on ſome occaſions ſeem to fail, and one ſeaſon to have uſurp'd the place of another; by means of which, dearths and famines and other calamities may inſue, in order to warn, inſtruct, and chaſtiſe the thoughtleſs and rebellious ſons of men. And it is not impoſſible, that natural decays, as the earth grows more aged, and gradual alterations which fall out in the courſe of time, may in ſome meaſure affect the order of things: But all this does not invalidate the truth of what is here ſaid, *that none of theſe things ſhould ceaſe*; perhaps not in *any* part of the earth altogether, much leſs in the greater part, and leſs ſtill over all the earth. Here let us briefly conſider two or three things which are very obſervable: 1. A beautiful and regular variety. 2. An amazing conſtancy in this regular variety. 3. An intimation that this regular conſtant ſucceſſion of things

things would *at laſt*, tho' long firſt, come to a period; *while the earth remaineth*, theſe things were not to ceaſe, tacitly implying that the earth ſhould continue many ages, but not always. The time would come when the *earth itſelf ſhould paſs away*, and then all thoſe things with regard to the earth muſt neceſſarily have an end.

1. ONE thing obſervable in the words, and which merits the moſt ſerious attention, is the beautiful and regular variety with which nature preſents us in the ſucceſſion of *night and day*, of *ſummer and winter*. All theſe are beautiful in their ſeaſon, and proclaim aloud the wiſdom of God which has diſpos'd things in ſuch order, and his ſuperintending providence which preſerves them in it. As to *day and night* there is ſomething grateful in this viciſſitude, as well as convenient in the preſent ſtate. ° *Light is ſweet, and a pleaſant thing it is to behold the ſun*; abſolutely conſidered, there is to be ſure no compariſon between light and darkneſs, either as to pleaſure or uſefulneſs; nor between the light of the ſun and any other light which is made, in ſome imperfect degree, to ſupply its place. But ſweet as light is 'tis *much ſweeter* after an interval of darkneſs. As pleaſant as it is to behold the ſun, this pleaſure is increas'd by

° Eccleſ. xi. 7.

his being abſent from us every four and twenty hours. By this means too nature hath mark'd out to thoſe who live in temperate climates proper times for labour and reſt, ſo that [p] *day unto day uttereth ſpeech, and night unto night ſheweth knowledge.* Beſides which it is to be conſidered, that if it was *always day* unto one half of our earthly globe, the other part muſt be buried in *perpetual darkneſs*; and ſo *part* only of the earth would be habitable inſtead of the *whole* as it is now. And why ſhould any find fault with the alternate reign of the night? Is it not to this we owe the dews, which being rais'd by the heat of the day are condens'd and fall again in the cool of the evening and the night, to the great refreſhment of the plants of the earth? And does not the ſame thing contribute to the better concocting and perfecting the juices of the plants, which in a perpetual ſunſhine would perſpire too ſenſibly and too faſt?

As to *ſeed-time* and *harveſt*; [q] *thou ſoweſt not that body which ſhall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or any other grain; but God giveth it a body as it has pleaſed him, and to every ſeed its own body.* And is it not ſurprizing to think of the transformation which the ſeeds of things undergo

[p] Pſal. xix. 2. [q] 1 Cor. xv. 37, 38.

dergo by being buried in the earth; how firſt *the blade ſprings up, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear*; which is but one inſtance among ten thouſand? What an infinite variety is there in the ſhapes, colours, odours, taſtes, and virtues, of plants and flowers and fruits? and how much the more agreeable is each of them for this variety? What is it brings all theſe out of the earth in their ſeaſon? doubtleſs the *providence* of God as the *firſt cauſe*, and *heat* as the principal and more immediate *ſecond cauſe*; but the *cold* too contributes its ſhare, by ſhutting in the ſubterranean warmth, and ſo gently fermenting the juices of the ſeeds, and preventing their puſhing too haſtily into the light. The *cold* too is indirectly a means of purifying the air, and invigorating the *earth* and the *bodies of men*; ſo that [r] *fire and hail, ſnow and vapour praiſe the Lord.* He has ſet *ſummer* and *winter* one over againſt the other; and who that ſees the face of the earth in winter, when all thoſe which we call annual plants die, and the plants and trees which ſurvive appear for the greater part of them in a withering dying ſtate; who that ſees this, were it not for his paſt experience which has ſhown him the difference, would imagine that a few months were capable of

[r] Pſal. cxlviii. 8.

effecting ſuch a change as we behold in ſummer? And that there is not only this variety in the ſeaſons, but ſuch a regular ſucceſſion of one to the other, is it not a demonſtrative proof of things being ordered and ſettled as they are by *infinite wiſdom* and *goodneſs?* Theſe things immediately depend upon the *poſition* of the *earth* with regard to the *ſun*, and the *motion* of one round the other; and to what but a ſupremely *wiſe and almighty cauſe* muſt we aſcribe it, that the earth is ſo plac'd and ſo mov'd; or the ſun and other heavenly bodies made to roll round that? To make day and night, and to bring about a regular ſucceſſion of theſe, and of the ſeaſons of the year, ſo that every ſeaſon may anſwer a ſeveral purpoſe, and all together conſpire to the preſervation and comfort of the human and every other ſpecies of living creatures, the concurrence of various cauſes, and particularly ſuch an exact adjuſtment of the diſtances, ſituations, and motions of the ſun and earth, and other great bodies of the univerſe is required, as can never be ſuppoſed to be *merely caſual.* Things could not be better framed and diſpoſed, if the greateſt poſſible power under the direction of the moſt conſummate ſkill had the framing and diſpoſing of them; which every wiſe man will judge reaſon enough to believe

believe that they were *actually* fram'd and diſpos'd by ſuch a power and ſkill.

2. WITH this beautiful and regular variety, here is a moſt amazing conſtancy. It was decreed and promis'd, that *while the earth remained, ſeed-time and harveſt, ſummer and winter, heat and cold, day and night ſhould not ceaſe*; and accordingly *they have not ceaſed*, tho' 'tis now *four thouſand years* ago that the earth was drown'd with a flood, and almoſt *ſix thouſand* ſince it was firſt created. Is not this a great while for ſuch a vaſt and complicated machine, conſiſting of ſo unconceivable a diverſity of parts and motions, to go on without any ſtop or irregular deviations from the general laws by which it is governed? Does this look like *chance?* Does it not rather evidently diſcover a moſt wiſe and powerful and good Providence, which coexiſts with all generations, and directs all theſe motions, and over-rules all the changes of time, proceeding itſelf by one and the ſame well laid and inimitable deſign? [f] *For ever, O Lord, thy word is ſettled in heaven, thy faithfulneſs is unto all generations. Thou haſt eſtabliſhed the earth and it abideth, they continue this day according to thine ordinances, for all are thy ſervants.* Theſe are the *ordinances* of the *moſt high*, there-

[f] Pſal. cxix. 89—91.

fore they *continue*; they are *his ſervants*, and therefore go on from age to age unwearied in the offices which he has appointed them. So that the reaſoning of thoſe ſcoffers mentioned by the apoſtle [t] *Peter*, who encourage themſelves to caſt off the fear of God from the *conſtancy* of his works, is ſenſeleſs, as well as impious. *Where*, ſay they, *is the promiſe of his coming? for ſince the fathers fell aſleep* (or excepting that the fathers are fallen aſleep, or that the inhabitants of the world are continually new) *all things continue as they were from the beginning of the world.* Tho' this is not ſtrictly true neither, ſince at the flood the foundations of the world were out of courſe, as the apoſtle takes notice immediately after. But is not this a very ſtrange objection? there is *no providence*, and conſequently *no judgment to come*, becauſe there is a *ſettled* courſe and method in which things proceed one age after another. Is not this turning that very thing into an *objection* againſt Providence, which is the moſt obvious *demonſtration* of it, and is ſo acknowledged even by *heathen* writers *? "The *order* of the ſtars and their *conſtancy* "through all time does neither agree with "the notion of *nature* or *neceſſity*, for it is "full of *reaſon*; nor of *chance* which is too "much

[t] 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4. * Cicero.

" much a friend to *variety* or change to " allow of ſuch a conſtancy." Were there variety only it would have more the face of *chance*, but here is *variety with unity*, a variety of parts and motions with an unity of deſign, and both theſe crown'd with conſtancy; which compleats the argument, and leaves thoſe without excuſe who beholding ſuch manifeſt ſignatures of a moſt wiſe, and powerful, and gracious Providence, will not yet be brought to acknowledge it, or to perform the duties which they owe it. The concluſion is that [u] *God commanded and they were created; he has alſo eſtabliſhed them for ever and ever by a decree which ſhall not paſs.*

3. THE laſt thing obſervable in the text is an intimation, that this regular conſtant ſucceſſion of things will at laſt, tho' *long* firſt, come to a period. *While* the earth *remaineth* theſe things are never to ceaſe; plainly implying that the earth was to continue many ages, but not always. The time would come when the earth itſelf ſhould paſs away, and then all theſe ordinances with regard to the earth muſt neceſſarily have an end. And accordingly it has been a † tradition of antient times confirmed by ſacred writ, that *the world is to periſh*

[u] Pſal. cxlviii. 5, 6.

† *Eſſe quoque in Fatis*, &c. OVID.

periſh by an univerſal conflagration. Its *firſt* deſtruction was by *water*, the *ſecond* will be by *fire*; after which there will be no farther ſucceſſion of men upon it; [w] *no marrying and being given in marriage* as there was after the flood, even though there ſhould be a *renovation* of the earth itſelf as ſome have imagin'd. St. *Peter* in anſwer to the objection of the *profane* ſcoffers before mentioned, after having taken notice of the deluge by which God executed his vengeance upon the old world, goes on to obſerve, that [x] *the heavens and the earth which are now, by the ſame word are kept in ſtore, reſerved unto fire againſt the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men*; and then in very ſtrong and moving language deſcribes that awful day. *The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens ſhall paſs away with a great noiſe, and the elements ſhall melt with fervent heat, the earth alſo and the works that are therein ſhall be burnt up*; from whence he infers, *ſeeing then that all theſe things ſhall be diſſolved, what manner of perſons ought ye to be in all holy converſation and godlineſs*; *looking for and haſting to the coming of the day of God?* And indeed who can make any other uſe of ſuch a conſideration who lays it to heart as

[w] Luke xx. 35. [x] 2 Pet. iii. 7.—3.

as he ought to do? Will the earth be burnt? ſo will *all the wicked* of the earth too. The *righteous* ſhall be ſaved from the *fire*, as righteous *Noah* was from periſhing in the *water*; when [y] *the ſinners in Zion ſhall be afraid, and fearfulneſs ſhall take hold of the hypocrites*; [z] *they ſhall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and ſo ſhall ever be with the Lord.*. [a] *Wherefore, beloved, ſeeing we look for ſuch things, let us be diligent that we may be found of him in peace, without ſpot and blameleſs.*

LET me now conclude with a very brief *application* of this ſubject.

AND what has been ſaid ſhould ingage us all to give God the glory of *this part* of his providential care and government of the world. I ſay *this part* of it; for the *earth* itſelf is but a very ſmall part of the *material* creation; (a ſingle grain as it were in compariſon of the univerſe) and as we have reaſon to think the number of mankind in the *moral* world bears no greater proportion to *all* other *intelligent* beings; ſo what relates to this earth muſt, comparatively ſpeaking, be no conſiderable part of the works of Providence. But how inconſiderable ſoever it be merely *as a part* of the intire ſcheme or deſign of Providence, of which we are very poor judges, it is *in itſelf* a very noble

[y] Iſai. xxxiii. 14. [z] 1 Theſſ. iv. 17. [a] 2 Pet. iii. 14.

noble and glorious diſplay of God's infinite perfections, and as ſuch ought to be obſerved and acknowledged by us, who are in a peculiar manner parties concerned. Let us adore the *wiſdom* of God which has eſtabliſh'd ſuch an admirable order and diſpoſition of things in the *natural* world, and ſuch a connection between the *natural* and the *moral* world, or the world of mankind. The preſent conſtitution of things, with reſpect to the earth and its circumſtances (if I may ſo call them) that is, the qualities of the atmoſphere, and nature of the ſeveral ſeaſons, is in *itſelf* wonderful. 'Tis ſtill more wonderful as *exactly adapted* to the preſent circumſtances of human nature, and the character and ſtate of mankind. Man himſelf being mutable and imperfect, every thing about him carries the marks of the ſame mutability and imperfection. Things are very well ſuited to a ſtate of trial; eſpecially of beings who have loſt their *innocence*, and have both many ſins to anſwer for, and many irregular affections to be cured. We are neither treated as creatures arrived to their utmoſt *perfection*, nor as ſinners paſt all *hope*; but in a middle way between both; alike fitted to teach us humility, and patience, and reſignation on the one hand, and to encourage our faith and hope on the other; which

which is a plain inſtance of the *wiſdom* of the ſupreme Being in the diſpenſations of his providence towards us. Let us alſo magnify the *power* of God, by our pious acknowledgments of this perfection, which he himſelf has ſo remarkably magnified in maintaining from age to age the order of the viſible creation, and particularly of *this* part of it. *Matter* being in its own nature a perfectly *unactive* principle, and as compoſed of parts which do not hang together by any propriety inherent in themſelves, 'tis impoſſible that ſuch a frame and order of things ſhould be continued without the *perpetual* ſuperintendency and influence of the *firſt cauſe*. And while we acknowledge that *wiſdom* and *power* belong to God, let us not be backward to pay him the tribute of praiſe which his great *goodneſs* to the children of men requires from us.—If theſe words, *the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth*, do not peculiarly relate to the firſt clauſe of the text, *I will not again curſe the ground any more for man's ſake*, but in *common* to that and the other parts of it; perhaps in that caſe inſtead of *for the imagination*, &c. the more proper tranſlation will be, *although the imagination*, &c. as I told you the *hebrew* particle is ſometimes rendred. And then theſe words will not be a *reaſon* of God's not curſing the

the ground, and ſmiting every living thing, and putting an end to the orderly return of the ſeaſons, (as they ſound now) but a conſideration fitted to illuſtrate the *goodneſs* of God, that notwithſtanding *the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth*, he yet determines [b] *not to leave men without witneſs* of his kind regard to them in every age of the world, *giving them rain and ſun-ſhine, and fruitful ſeaſons, and filling their hearts with food and gladneſs*. But then we muſt not reſtrain the ſignification of this exception to any diſorder of our nature which is *original* and *unavoidable*, for as much as we are no way anſwerable for this; but muſt underſtand it of thoſe *early* departures from God, and tranſgreſſions of his law, which ariſe *too commonly* indeed, but *not neceſſarily*, out of the circumſtances of our birth and education. Let us bleſs God who has not long ſince put an end to the human race, notwithſtanding mens ſo generally acting in contradiction to their reaſon, as ſoon as they come to the uſe of it; and when become capable of glorifying God, yet ſo ſeldom taking any care to do it. However early or univerſal this degeneracy may be, let us heartily endeavour to be exceptions from it; as nothing further is neceſſary under the

[b] Acts xiv. 17.

the influences of *divine grace* to our being ſo, but that we *ſincerely* and *conſtantly* endeavour it. [c] *Let us glorify God with our bodies and with our ſouls which are his*, and in the uſe and enjoyment of all thoſe earthly bleſſings which in the courſe of his providence he beſtows upon us; and then we may be ſure of paſſing at death into a more perfect ſtate, where there are no ſuch *revolutions* as in the preſent, but one unchangeable flow of happineſs to eternal ages.

[c] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

SERMON VIII.

Religion one thing, and the one thing needful.

LUKE X. 42.

But one thing is needful ——

WHEN our bleſſed Lord lived and converſed here upon earth, he was not ſo poor and deſpiſed but he had ſome real friends, who had the courage to confeſs him before men, received and entertained him gladly at their houſes, and thought themſelves greatly honoured by his preſence. Of this number were *Lazarus* and his *two* ſiſters, from whom Jeſus, the *friend*, the *prophet*, the *ſaviour*, never failed of meeting with a moſt cordial welcome. And well were they rewarded for it; for 'tis ſaid, [a] that *Jeſus loved Martha and her ſiſter, and Lazarus.* He had a more particular kindneſs and eſteem

[a] John xi. 5.

eſteem for them, and what could they deſire more, or how have their names more honourably recorded! The ſame, or the like honour have *all* his *ſaints*, for Chriſt is not partial, is never backward to love any *who love him* and true *goodneſs in ſincerity*, but will inroll *their names in the Lamb's book of life*, where they will be found written at the laſt day under this character affix'd to them, *the lovers* and the *beloved of Jeſus*.

IT was at *Martha*'s houſe, and in reply to ſomewhat ſhe had ſaid, that our Lord ſpoke theſe words. For while ſhe was buſied in making proviſion for her gueſts, her ſiſter took the opportunity, which the preſence and converſation of Chriſt afforded her, to attend to his divine and heavenly diſcourſes; which occaſioned a *complaint* on *Martha*'s ſide, that the whole trouble of the entertainment ſhould be laid on her; and a *requeſt* to our Saviour, that he would put her ſiſter on doing her part. But no words can repreſent this matter ſo well, as thoſe of the ſacred *hiſtorian*, beginning at *ver.* 38. *Now it came to paſs as they went, that he entred into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received him into her houſe; and ſhe had a ſiſter called Mary, who alſo ſat at Jeſus feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbred about much*

ſerving, and came unto him and ſaid, Lord, doſt not thou care that my ſiſter has left me to ſerve alone? bid her therefore that ſhe help me. And Jeſus anſwered and ſaid unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful, and Mary hath choſen that good part, which ſhall not be taken from her. In which anſwer of our Lord to *Martha*'s addreſs, we are not to ſuppoſe, that he abſolutely condemns her looking after the buſineſs of the family, and being deſirous to entertain her friend in a handſome manner, eſpecially, one ſo highly valued and greatly reverenced by her as Chriſt was; but only her *immoderate* application to theſe lower concerns, and *too great* ſollicitouſneſs to have every thing done in the exacteſt manner; her being *cumbred with much ſerving*, and as our Saviour tells her, *troubled about many things.* Nor, farther, are we to conclude that *Martha* had not choſen the *good part* as well as *Mary*, but only that ſhe did not in this particular inſtance act ſo conſiſtently with her general choice. — *But one thing is needful*, Here abſtracting from the *particular* concern which true chriſtians have in theſe words, I ſhall conſider them as *univerſally* inſtructive, and accordingly briefly treat of this obſervation from them, *That religion is the one thing needful.* We are not here to underſtand religion

ligion *objectively*, i. e. as comprehending the doctrines, rules, and promises, of which we have a summary account in our bibles; but as it is made a *personal* thing, a *character* and *possession* of our own, which we call *subjective* religion. 'Tis the same in sense as the *image* or *life* of God in the soul of man; a *prevailing* disposition to every thing that is good, expressed in a constant and uniform regularity of the external conversation. My design in handling this subject is,

I. To shew in what respects religion may properly be stiled *one thing*, And,

II. To prove that it *is the one thing needful*,

I. I AM to shew in what respects religion may be said to be *one thing*. Religion is a *complex* term, it stands for all the virtues and duties of a good life. All these *together* go to constitute what we stile *religion*. And yet though composed of such a variety of parts, it is really but *one thing*, and therein differs from *vice*, which is made up of all *inconsistencies*. Religion is *one* chiefly on the following accounts.

1. RELIGION is *one* in its *object*. All the branches and offices of religion termi-

nate in God, as ſo many lines in their center, which is the reaſon that in ſcripture religion is ſo often expreſt by the *fear of the Lord*; *ſeeking and ſerving God*; by *coming unto him*; and *obeying his commandments*. The true ground of theſe and other expreſſions of a like kind is, that as there would be no ſuch thing as religion, exactly ſpeaking, if there was no God; ſo nothing can be judged religion, or any way belonging to it, which hath not its *immediate* or *ultimate* reſpect unto God. Religion is a comprehenſive word, it takes in the whole duty of man, towards God, our neighbour, and ourſelves. And tho' indeed, when uſed in the *ſtricteſt* acceptation, only *that* part of our duty which we directly owe to the Deity, paſſes under the name of religion; yet in a *larger* ſenſe, righteouſneſs and ſobriety are alſo duties of religion, as they flow from a ſincere regard to the *authority* of God commanding them, and to his *glory*, which is promoted by them. In this ſenſe, it is neceſſary that *God* ſhould be *all in all*; that he ſhould be infinitely more than all to our ſouls, and that in all our actions we ſhould ſeek to do his will. Without this *ſingleneſs* of aim our religion is of no value. We may be *temperate* for *our own* ſakes, and *juſt* for the ſake of *others*; but then we ſhould be both juſt and temperate

perate likewiſe out of reſpect to God, to whom we owe all the powers of our nature, and all the comforts and enjoyments of our lives; and to whom therefore we ſhould dedicate ourſelves, and all our actions. [b] *Whatever we do, we ſhould do it as unto the Lord*; ſo *ſervants* are commanded to *obey their maſters.* We are to [c] *ſet the Lord always before us*, in the *whole* courſe of our converſation, and more eſpecially then in all *offices of piety, and exerciſes of devotion.* And if ſo, what are we to think of thoſe who are ſo far from having a conſtant regard to God, that they may pleaſe him in the general conduct of their lives, as even in the duties of divine worſhip to be acted and influenced by other views? For certain ſuch perſons are utter ſtrangers to true religion.

2. RELIGION is *one thing* in its *principle.* The *parts* are various, but one and the ſame *life* is common to all. As many men as there are in the world, ſo many diſtinct and individuating principles of life are there, one independent of the other; but we cannot ſay there are *as many lives*, as there are *parts* and *members* in the *ſame* man. Life may appear differently according to the different functions of the parts, each *ſenſe* having its peculiar *manner* of perception; but ſtill the

[c] Col. iii. 22—3. Pſal. xvi. 8.

principle of life, by which the eye ſees, the ear hears, the tongue diſtinguiſhes taſtes, and the whole body feels and moves, is one *indiviſible* thing. And ſo is that *divine principle*, by which the ſoul lives and acts in a *ſpiritual* ſenſe. It penetrates the underſtanding, the conſcience, the will, the affections, and is diffuſed through the whole ſoul, imparting vigour and activity to every faculty. And what is this *hidden life?* 'tis ſomething which is better *felt*, than expreſt. That there is ſuch a thing, no truly good man can reaſonably doubt, any more than other men can make it a ſerious queſtion whether they are endowed with the life of ſenſe and reaſon. But to define and explain it is not ſo eaſy. It cannot be any thing diſtinct from the ſoul, and properly infuſed into it; but a certain *rectitude* and *vigour* beſt known by its effects. For when the powers of the ſoul are capable of exerting themſelves after a holy and ſpiritual manner, and of converſing with the nobleſt objects with profit and delight; 'tis by virtue of this life, which actuates them. Then are we partakers of the life of God, and live to God. This is the *unity* of religion, it is a unity of *life* and *power*. And foraſmuch as the *ſame* omnipreſent Spirit is the original fountain of this life in all upright minds, by means of which they are inclined and actuated after

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the ſame manner; hence it is that [d] *all* ſuch *are one* in a ſenſe not common to the reſt of mankind, and walk together in the moſt indiſſoluble bonds. The church of Chriſt makes but one body, not only in a *political* ſenſe, or as governed by *one head*; but as [e] *filled* and *animated* by *one vital ſpirit*. What a glorious life is this, how ſublime, how extenſive! This is the true *anima mundi*, or *ſoul* of the *world*; not like that which has been imagined to move the world of lumpiſh *matter*, but paſſing thro' the whole world of renewed ſanctified *ſpirits*, exciting their operations, and making them capable of the moſt pure and ſeraphic delights.

3. RELIGION is *one thing* by virtue of the *connection* and *proportion of its parts*. We ſay the world is *one* becauſe by the order and regularity of the parts, their mutual dependence, and the beauty of the whole frame; it ſhews itſelf to have been contrived with *one* wiſe and univerſal deſign. Thus any work of *art*, whether it be a curious engine, or a fine and well compacted building, is *one*; becauſe the parts which compoſe it are ſo proportioned and adjuſted, as not only to pleaſe the eye, but to anſwer ſome valuable uſe; as a clock to meaſure the time, and a houſe for the conveniency of habitation. The like unity and

[d] John xvii. 22, 23. [e] Epheſ. iv. 4.

proportion are discernable in a *religious* life; all the actions of which are link'd together, and constitute one entire and beautiful body of virtue and goodness. *Religion* exemplified in the life is as truly *one* thing, as any the greatest master-piece of *art* or *nature* can be. There is a wonderful order and harmony in a good life; each duty has its proper place, and one grace or virtue is upheld or set off by another; temperance and righteousness by piety, and piety by righteousness and temperance. There is such a connection between the virtues of the christian life, that they can never be separated, it being impossible that a man should practice *any one* virtue in *sincerity*, or upon a principle of *conscience*, who does not live in the discharge of *all*. Nay, and could they be separated, yet neither of them, without the company of the rest, would be half so lovely; godliness not without sobriety and justice, nor justice and sobriety without godliness. In the *moral world* this would be another such monstrous appearance, as a body without hands or feet in the *natural* world. But when *all* the *parts* of religion are united in their respective subordinations to each other, religion appears to its greatest advantage, and is acknowledged to be something divine.

4. RE-

4. RELIGION, in regard of its *ſcope* and *tendency*, is *one thing*. The whole ſcope of religion is *happineſs*; and in this religion agrees with all the other methods and employments of life, each of which propoſes happineſs as its end. Let the *means* be what they will, the general *end* to which they are directed is *happineſs*. For this the ſcholar, the merchant, the artizan, the labourer, are all buſy; the voluptuary, the covetous, the ambitious, *agree* in their *common* aim with one another, and with the religious; for they would all be happy, and ſo would the religious man. But then in another reſpect the difference between *religion* and *other ways* of life, eſpecially thoſe which are *vicious*, is exceeding great. *All* the *parts* and *duties* of religion, and *all* who are *religious*, look towards *one* and the *ſame* happineſs, and the happineſs they aim at is the only *true* one. One religious man does not purſue *one kind* of happineſs, and another a *quite different*; the deſign of *one* virtue is not the attainment of a *leſſer* felicity, and of another a *greater*; all the virtues, and all the virtuous bending one way, even to the enjoyment of the ſupreme and all-ſufficient Being as the *chief* good and *ultimate* portion of man. But now aſk the men of the world what are their ideas of happineſs, and you will hardly have the very

very *ſame* anſwer from any two of them; one placing it in *ſenſual* pleaſures, another in *riches*, another in *honour* and *power*, with a diverſity of circumſtances and appendages. And if you enquire farther, you will ſee, that the *ſame* perſon does not confine himſelf to *one* object, but purſues *ſeveral*; and theſe by means as different as the ends for which they are choſen. O vain and reſtleſs condition of human life, where *religion* is not the *guide!* worn and diſtracted with a *thouſand* croſſing views, and cares, and intereſts, which finally leave a man in deſpair of ever accompliſhing his deſires. Happy they who conſult *religion* in the choice of their *felicity!* they have *one* care, *one* view, *one* intereſt. To enjoy God is their whole concern, his *favour* is their *life*, *his loving-kindneſs* even *better* to them *than life*. So far as they can enjoy God, ſo far, and no farther, they are happy in this world; but their enjoyment of God now being very imperfect, compared with that which makes the happineſs of the future ſtate, with all the ſtrength of their ſouls they aſpire after that; certain that they ſhall be perfectly at reſt when they ſhall have attained this end of their faith, and hope, and obedience, the perfection of their nature, and their felicity in the perfect and eternal fruition of the *infinite good*. So much for

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the *firſt* general, or in what reſpects *religion* is properly *one thing*.

II. I am next to *prove* that *religion* is the *one thing needful*. The word *needful* is here taken in its moſt abſolute and unlimited ſenſe; according to which *that alone* is needful, which cannot, in *any* caſe, or upon *any* conſideration whatſoever be diſpenſed with or neglected; the want of which nothing elſe can ſupply; and which, if there ſhould ariſe a competition between that and other things, ſo that one or other muſt give place, ought always to be prefered. This is the ſenſe which the term *needful* carries in this place; denoting what is *abſolutely*, i. e. *unchangeably*, *univerſally*, and *eternally* needful: and even in this ſtricteſt acceptation of the word *religion* is *needful*, but *nothing* elſe. The particular *characters* or *marks*, by which this *abſolute* needfulneſs of religion is known and diſtinguiſhed, are theſe following.

1. RELIGION is *abſolutely needful*, becauſe needful to the *eſſential* or *negative* part of *happineſs*. I call that the *eſſential* part of happineſs *without* which a man muſt needs be *miſerable*, of whatever elſe he is poſſeſſed. If therefore it ſhall appear that religion is thus needful, it muſt be own'd to be *abſolutely* needful; ſince the firſt thing

thing needful in the apprehenſion of every reaſonable man, and the firſt thing every ſuch perſon will look after is, that he *be not miſerable*.—But you will aſk, when may any one be looked on as *miſerable?* I anſwer, when his condition is ſuch, that he had better *not be* at all, than continue in *ſuch* a condition; and he will be convinced hereof himſelf when he comes to reflect, and apprehend the truth of his ſtate. And is not this the caſe of all thoſe who are ſtrangers and enemies to religion? In my opinion it may eaſily be made appear that it is. To be without religion in the truth of it, is to be without *all love to God*, and *intereſt in him*; and of whomſoever this may be affirmed, we may truly ſay they are in ſuch a ſtate of ſoul, that were they to continue in it, it would *be good for them they had never been born*; and they would have too much reaſon to wiſh they could return to their primitive *nothing*. To have *no love to God*, whom we were *made* to love, and whom, by a thouſand reaſons and motives, we are *obliged* to love, muſt argue ſuch a depravation of nature, ſuch a fall from our original rectitude, ſuch a diſorder and corruption in our rational faculties, as cannot but be attended with the greateſt miſery; *miſery* being nothing elſe but a *ſtate contrary* to the *nature* which God has given us,

us, and *in* which therefore *nature* can have no reſt and ſatisfaction. —— Again, to be without *all intereſt in God*, which is the caſe of thoſe who are deſtitute of religion, is the ſame as having *no part* in the *chief* good and happineſs of man; for the chief good and only proper happineſs of man is God, the fountain and the center of his being. Now, if to be without religion is to be without God, and to be without God is to be without that happineſs for which man was originally intended, then to be without religion, is indeed to be miſerable. Nothing can be more evident. 'Tis very true, wicked men may not be ſenſible of this *now*, they may be ſo far from *acknowledging* their miſery, as to be ready to fancy, could they eternally remain in the ſame condition, they ſhould be happy enough *without* God. But this is only becauſe they do not make any uſe of their reaſon. For did they know and conſider what it is for a reaſonable creature to have his mind and heart *averſe* from God, and the exerciſe of virtue and goodneſs, they would ſee it to be a moſt deplorable circumſtance; and this they will be *forced* to conſider one time or other. The miſt will vaniſh from before their eyes, and then they will find themſelves to be in a naked and forlorn condition indeed. And as to what they imagine, that, could they

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but make their worldly prosperity eternal, they should be eternally happy, it is a perfect mistake. For, alas! the ground of all that pleasure and amusement which carnal minds have in these things, is their *novelty*; so that in length of *time*, and much more in *eternity*, these vanities would lose all their fancied charms, and appear to be what they are, of little or no real worth: and then, awaking out of this fool's paradise, they would have a lively sense of their misery in being *estranged* from God, and *enemies to him thro' wicked works.* I may appeal to those who admire riches, or honour, or sensual pleasure, whether they have so great an opinion of these things, after they have enjoyed them for some time, as they had at first; whether the delight they afford them does not continually lessen, and consequently, whether it would not entirely vanish, were they only to enjoy them a *thousand years*, and even turn into *loathing* and *disgust*, if there was to be no *end* of enjoyment? And whenever this happened, that these false goods did no longer appear amiable in the eyes of those who had most eagerly pursued them, they would then be sensible of their want of that real, that substantial good, which they had hitherto neglected, and of their misery in wanting it, and so pine away in fruitless remorse and eternal

eternal deſpair. From hence it follows, that men muſt be miſerable without religion; and, which is more, would at length be convinced of their miſery, though they were to have the everlaſting poſſeſſion of thoſe things which do, for ſome little time, divert and ſtifle their ſenſe of it. And what then will it be, when they ſhall at once be *baniſhed* from the *uncreated good*, and *for ever ſtrip'd* of *all other good*, real and imaginary? Religion therefore is *abſolutely* needful, and it is the *only* thing which is ſo. Other things are needful with relation to this or that particular ſort and degree of happineſs, not abſolutely to the *eſſential* or *negative* part of felicity, or ſo as that without them we muſt fall into unavoidable miſery, and have reaſon to wiſh that we did not exiſt at all. To a *worldly happineſs* the poſſeſſions of the *world* are neceſſary, and to a *ſenſual happineſs* the pleaſures and enjoyments of *ſenſe*; but then a perſon may be truly happy, who has *neither* of theſe two ſorts of happineſs, ſenſual or worldly. He may be happy in the *peace* and *tranquility* of his mind, in the *conſcience* of doing well, in the *evidences* of *God's love*, *devout intercourſes* with him, and a well-grounded *hope* and *confidence* towards him, that all things ſhall turn out well at laſt. And tho' it ſhould be farther confeſſed, that in the preſent ſtate, *religion alone*

alone does not render a man ſo *completely happy*, as an *equal* degree of *religion*, join'd with a *competency* of *outward* good things, yet this will only prove that theſe things are *relatively needful*, or with reſpect to certain *degrees* of happineſs, not *abſolutely* ſo; ſince the truly good man, tho' deprived of them, does not preſently become miſerable; but, on the contrary, finds that ſatisfaction in the duties of religion, and that ſupport from the thoughts of God, from his preſence and favour, eſpecially if eminently good, as abundantly compenſate his worldly penury, and render his condition, how wretched ſoever in the account of others, very tolerable to himſelf.

THIS is the *firſt* character of a thing *abſolutely needful*; it is needful to the *eſſential* or *negative* part of happineſs; or *ſo* needful, that a man without it, and ſuppoſed to *continue* without it, muſt be *miſerable*.

2. Religion is *abſolutely needful*, as it is alike needful in *all ages* and *nations* of the world; and not *relatively* to *one* age, and place, and country, which is the caſe as to a great many other things. The nations of the earth have their *different* languages, and cuſtoms, and habits, and rules of civil behaviour; and all and each of theſe in the *ſame* country, are liable to endleſs *changes* in the courſe of time: the ground of which difference and vicif-

viciſſitude as to all theſe things is, that they are not founded in the nature and reaſon of the things themſelves, but depend on fancy, and temper, and climate, and numberleſs accidental circumſtances. By which means it comes to paſs, that thoſe things which are decent and of good report in *one* part of the world, are not ſo in *another*, nor in the *ſame* place at all times. And as opinions and cuſtoms vary, ſo a wiſe man will change with them, and rather than incur the imputation of an *affected ſingularity*, which may leſſen his character, and render him leſs uſeful, will, in theſe indifferent matters, *become all things to all men*, conforming to the notions, and uſages, and rules of ſpeaking and geſture which are received in the place where he lives. All this he will do, becauſe *prudence* makes ſuch a conformity needful, and *charity* too, that he may be capable of doing more good. But then he conſiders that theſe things are not needful in their own nature, but only made ſo by the mutable circumſtances of time and place; and therefore he takes care not to confound thoſe things, which have but an occaſional and temporary expediency, with thoſe which are of eternal obligation; things of *civil prudence* and decency, with the things of *religion*. A *right temper* of ſoul towards *God*, conſiſting in *fear*, and *love*,

and *gratitude*, and *adoration*, and *truſt*; and towards *man*, conſiſting in *univerſal benevolence* or good will; and both theſe manifeſted in all the actions and virtues of a holy and good life, is what I mean by *religion*. Now theſe things are in their *nature* good and excellent, and eſtimable, and therefore cannot ceaſe to be ſo by change of place or time. 'Tis true, men may and often have different notions as to *religion* itſelf, but then it is moſtly with reſpect to the *ſpeculative doctrines* of religion, or *modes* of divine worſhip, not in regard of the *parts* and *duties* of a virtuous and pious behaviour. And whatever variety, and alteration there may be in either of theſe, *i. e.* in religious ſentiments or practiſes; there ought to be an agreement and uniformity as far forth as God has diſcovered his will to men, and they have opportunities of coming to the knowledge of it. [f] *Whereto they have attained, they ſhould walk by the ſame rule, and mind the ſame thing*, the *edification* of themſelves and others in true goodneſs. And however common and prevailing, or of how long ſtanding ſoever any opinions or cuſtoms are in matters of religion, a man is to carry his *conformity* no farther than his *conſcience* gives him leave; remembring that religion is not a thing to be moulded and faſhioned after the will of man,

[f] Phil. iii. 13.

man, and the humour of the times; that a *great part* of religion, indeed *all* of it which *immediately* and *evidently* regards a heavenly and devout temper of ſoul, and a regular and good life, is as *immutable* in its nature as *God himſelf*, its *author*, *object*, and *end*. And as to the *poſitive* part of religion, or that which owes *all* its *obligation* to God's *revealed* will, beſides that there is but little of that kind belonging to *chriſtianity*, there ought to be nothing either diminiſhed or added without a divine warrant.—You ſee then how, in theſe reſpects alſo religion may be ſaid to be *the one thing* needful The rules and notions of civil *decency* may vary, and men very innocently comply with the change; but that men ſhould *fear God and keep his commandments*, that they ſhould believe as true whatſoever they have ſufficient evidence of God's having revealed, that they ſhould worſhip him in the manner he has directed, rely on his promiſes, and prefer his favour to the whole world; this is *alike needful* in the moſt diſtant times and places, and to people the moſt oppoſite and unlike one the other in all other things. However unlike in other things, in this they ſhould all agree and center, to poſtpone the care of the body to that of the ſoul, the pleaſing of men or of themſelves, to the pleaſing of God, and the intereſts of time

to thoſe of eternity. And in this, all wiſe and good men. *i. e.* all the people of God, of all times, and of all nations and languages, will unite together, and not be afraid or aſhamed to differ from the multitude, who go a contrary way. The church of God is not more *variable*, as to its *external ſtate* (being ſometimes *proſperous*, at other times *perſecuted* and *oppreſſed*, ſometimes of a *larger*, at other times of a *narrower* extent,) than it is *invariable* with relation to its *real* and *living members*; for, in this ſenſe, the true church is a *ſucceſſion of perſons guided and influenced by one and the ſame divine Spirit, and linked together by one common band of faith, and hope, and charity.* And theſe, in whatever age or place their lot is caſt, bear their joint teſtimony to the cauſe of God, *i. e.* of truth and righteouſneſs, act by the ſame rules and maxims, purſue the ſame intereſt, and obſerve the *ſame* conduct towards the *world.* My meaning is, they [g] *all* of them, conſider the world as a *ſtrange* and even *hoſtile* country, as the place of their *pilgrimage*, as *corrupted* in its cuſtoms and manners; and therefore not to be followed but in ſuch inſtances alone as do not claſh with their high calling, and with the laws and inſtitutions of their *heavenly* country. This is another *character*, by which reli-

[g] Hebr. ii. 13.

religion is proved to be the *one thing needful*, *viz.* its being *alike needful* in *all ages and nations* of the world.

3. THAT religion is the *one thing needful*, i. e. *abſolutely* needful, appears from its being *equally* needful for *all perſons*, of whatever rank and denomination, or way and method of life; for *ſuperiors*, *inferiors*, and *equals*; for the *contemplative* and the *active*: and not *relatively* to *ſome* perſons *excluſive* of others, like a great many other things. 'Tis only a *principle* of *religion* which can effectually teach princes and ſubjects, parents and children, maſters and ſervants, paſtors and people, the rich and the poor, thoſe in a higher or a lower, or an equal condition, to diſcharge the duties they mutually owe one another, ſo as to anſwer the great end of mens entering into ſociety, and to make every member of the community ſerviceable to the whole. That every man may fill up the duties of his place and adorn it, he ought [h] to *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour*. There are, indeed, *peculiar* duties belonging to *each* relation and degree; but then a religious and chriſtian temper, a regard to their common Lord, and the care of their ſalvation ſhould poſſeſs *all*, from the leaſt to the greateſt. And as this *inward* part of *religion*, this *habit* of *piety*, and

[h] Tit. ii. 10.

taſte for *univerſal goodneſs*, would excite all to the performance of thoſe general duties to which all are under the ſame obligations; ſuch as the *worſhip of God* in *publick* and *private*, *ſobriety* of life, *juſtice*, *kindneſs*, *truth*, and *fidelity*; ſo both theſe together (I mean an inward principle of religion, join'd with the conſtant obſervations of the general rules of chriſtianity) would, without fail, produce a more conſcientious regard to thoſe *ſpecial* duties which ariſe out of the ſeveral relations in which men ſtand to one another. Upon ſuppoſition, other things are equal, there is no one behaves ſo well in every relation as the truly religious man. For ſuch a man always acts from *conſcience* and *principle*, which makes him both more *exact*, and more *even*, and *ſteddy* in his conduct, that he may pleaſe God; *by whom* he conſiders himſelf as *plac'd* in every *particular* condition, and *to whom* he expects to *give* his final *account*. This ſhows religion to be the *one thing needful*, being needful for perſons of *all ranks*, whither ſuperiors, inferiors, or equals. And the ſame may be demonſtrated with like evidence as to the *ſeveral ways* of life, which men embrace, whether, in general, the *contemplative* or the *active*; and, in the active, the different *callings* and *profeſſions* which they chuſe to follow. The neceſſity of

of religion, both in the *choice* and *profecution* of all theſe is eaſily diſcernable. For, unleſs; in their firſt engaging in any way of life, and in their after progreſs in it, they propoſe the *glory* of God as their *end*, and the *diſcharge* of a good conſcience as their immutable *rule*; they will be liable to perpetual errors and diſappointments as to themſelves, and be in danger of injuring, or at beſt, of being leſs uſeful, if not quite uſeleſs to others. Whereas, on the contrary, if this be their *end*, and this their *principle*, if their firſt enquiry be whether they are called to this or that employment by the *providence* of God, and their next care [i] *therein to abide with him*; they will be more diligent and ſucceſsful, will be more ſafe from the ſnares and temptations that attend their employment, have more comfort and ſatisfaction in their own breaſts, more credit among their acquaintance, and be more beneficial to all. Such will be the happy influence of religion upon the choice and proſecution of the ſeveral callings and profeſſions to which men apply themſelves. Whether they like a more ſtudious and retired life, or appear on the ſtage of the world, their aim will be to glorify God, to do good to men, and advance their own ſalvation. Religion therefore is the *one thing needful*, be-

[i] 1 Cor. vii. 24.

cauſe needful for *all perſons* of whatever rank and relation, and in every courſe of life, which other things are not. There are certain gifts, and accompliſhments, and qualifications, ſuch kinds of knowledge, ſuch and ſuch abilities, which are *needful* for *ſome*, but *inſignificant* for *others*: on *theſe* they would be perfectly loſt, and not ſo much as ſerve for ornament and ſhow, not bringing the leaſt addition to their reputation, while, to the *former*, they are of indiſpenſible uſe. And thus, as by theſe different inclinations, talents, and abilities men are diſtinguiſhed from each other, and fitted for various employments, ſo they become uſefully ſubſervient to the wiſe deſigns of providence in the preſent ſtate; but are not all equally inſtructed and benefited as they are by religion.

4. RELIGION is the *one thing abſolutely needful*, as it is needful *without any ceſſation or intermiſſion* of time, and not *relatively* to this or that *particular* ſeaſon. But of this, and the remaining parts of this ſubject, in the next diſcourſe.

SER-

SERMON IX.

Religion the one thing needful.

LUKE x. 42.

But one thing is needful ——

IN a former diſcourſe on theſe words, I

I. SHEW'D you in what reſpects religion may properly be ſtiled *one thing*. Religion is *one* in its *object*, in its *principle*, in and by virtue of the *connection* and *proportion* of its *parts*, and finally, in its *ſcope* and *tendency*.

II. I PROCEEDED to prove that *religion* is the *one thing needful*. The particular character or marks by which this *abſolute needfulneſs* of religion is known and diſtinguiſh'd, are theſe following.

1. RELIGION is *abſolutely needful*, becauſe needful to the eſſential or negative part of

of happineſs; that without which a man muſt needs be *miſerable*, of whatever elſe he is poſſeſt.

2. RELIGION is *abſolutely needful* as it is alike needful in *all ages and nations* of the world.

3. RELIGION appears to be *abſolutely* needful from its being equally needful to all perſons, of whatever rank, denomination or way of life. Theſe ſeveral characters I have explained and ſhewn to belong to religion; and I now proceed to another mark or character.

4. RELIGION is the *one thing abſolutely needful*, as it is needful *without any ceſſation or intermiſſion of time*; and not *relatively* to this or that particular ſeaſon. [a] *Solomon* has obſerved, that *to every thing there is a ſeaſon, and a time to every purpoſe under heaven.* A time for things as contrary one to the other as *weeping* and *laughing*, *keeping* and *caſting away*, *ſpeaking* and being *ſilent*; which are ſome of the particulars enumerated by him. And foraſmuch as theſe things are in their kind oppoſite one to the other, they cannot be all in ſeaſon at the ſame time; and when they are done out of ſeaſon, they occaſion a part of that vanity and vexation of which the Wiſe-man complains. 'Tis not beneath the notice of *prudence*, after

[a] Eccleſ. iii. 1.

after what manner a perſon may ſo regulate his conduct as not to offend in theſe ſmaller matters; that his converſation may be well ordered as to the extra-eſſential points, and every part of his behaviour guided and tempered with diſcretion. But that which every man ſhould be infinitely more careful about is ſomething which is *always in ſeaſon*, and therefore *always beautiful and neceſſary*. And what is that? 'Tis *religion*. A man muſt never lay aſide his religion, but be continually cloathed with it, and carry it with him into all places and companies, he muſt be [b] *in the fear of the Lord all the day long*, and not ſo much as for a moment forget the *rule* by which he is to walk, the *word of God*; for [c] *when he goes it ſhall lead him, when he ſleeps it ſhall keep him, and when he wakes it ſhall talk with him. For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light, and reproofs of inſtruction are the way of life.* From all which we are not to conclude, that every *particular duty* of religion is always in ſeaſon; for religion being a complex thing, made up of a great number of parts cannot be reduced into act all at once. But then *ſome duty or other* is ſtill to be practiſed by us, and *a religious habit and temper* is never out of ſeaſon. The diſtinction between *affirmative* and *negative* precepts may help to give us a clearer

[b] Prov. xxiii. 17. [c] Prov. vi. 22, 23.

clearer notion of this matter. *Negative* precepts, or precepts delivered in a *negative form* (such as these, [d] *be not drunk with wine wherein is excess*, [e] *thou shalt not steal*; *thou shalt not covet*; [f] *lie not one to the other*; *set not your affections on things below:* these and all other the like precepts) oblige *ad semper* as they term it, to keep them *always*, and as much at one time as at another. And the reason of this is plain, that they only command the *forbearance* of such and such sinful actions, and we can at once forbear a thousand things. But *affirmative* precepts, or those which enjoin some action, as praying, hearing, meditating, giving alms, and doing all other offices of love; these oblige us *semper*, but not *ad semper*, i. e. they *always* oblige us, but not *to always*, or to the continued performance of them, this being impossible; since a man cannot at the same time be in his closet and in the public congregation, offering sacrifice and performing an act of mercy, negociating his earthly business and thinking only of heaven. However the religion of the *heart*, or a holy aim and regular tendency of soul must never be intermitted; and if it be not, will not only be attended with a good life, but keep us in a constant *readiness* for the duties to which

[d] Ephes. v. 18. [e] Exod. xx. 15, 17. [f] Colos. iii. 2.

which we may be occaſionally called. And in this ſenſe we may *always pray* to God and *do good* to men, and *mind heavenly things*; being *always* in a devout benevolent heavenly *diſpoſition*, and by ſuch a diſpoſition prepared to embrace every opportunity of exerciſing the outward acts of prayer, benificence, and divine meditation. Religion therefore is *abſolutely needful*, becauſe needful *without any ceſſation* or *intermiſſion* of time.

5. RELIGION is *abſolutely needful* as it is needful in *all conditions and changes of life*; in proſperity and adverſity, in health and ſickneſs, in peace and trouble; in each of theſe, and in *paſſing* out of *one* into the *other*, the neceſſity and uſe of religion is manifeſt. In a *proſperous* ſtate wherein is included health of body and an affluence of outward good things, how impoſſible is it a man ſhould do well, who throws off all regard to religion? he will neither have the *true enjoyment* of his proſperity, nor know how to make the *right uſe* of it. Without religion it is not poſſible he ſhould *enjoy* his proſperity. By enjoying proſperity, I mean having *that ſatisfaction* which ſuch a ſtate is fitted to adminiſter. And what is the greateſt ſatisfaction of ſuch a ſtate? Is it only to gratify the ſenſes, and the ſenſual or worldly inclinations, and to be free from thoſe cares and labours which are the lot of others?

others? No certainly, this is not all; for the ſenſes may be gratified to the full, or we may have power of ſo gratifying them, and the mind labour under great diſſatisfaction; nay, and it muſt do ſo if the body be either gratified in what it ought not to have, which is *prodigality*; or denied what it ought to have, which is *covetouſneſs*. The only way of our preventing both theſe, and obſerving a proper *medium*, is to liſten to the voice of religion, which will teach us how to extract the good out of every enjoyment. Nor is it to any great purpoſe, that we are by our proſperity freed from the neceſſity of thoſe cares and labours to which others are ſubject, if other cares as bad or worſe take their room; as they certainly will if religion does not keep them out. The proſperous wicked man is perhaps exempt from the care and labour of providing a ſubſiſtence for himſelf and family; but then he has the care of ſecuring and managing his abundance, he labours under a diſcontented mind, and the reproaches of a guilty conſcience; he has a perpetual uneaſineſs within him which will for ever hinder the pure genuine reliſh of his earthly comforts. The *poſſeſſion* of the world is one thing, and the *enjoyment* of it another. He only enjoys the world who enjoys the favour of God with it.

God

[g] *God giveth to a man, that is good in his ſight, wiſdom, and knowledge, and joy,* (*wiſdom and knowledge* to *moderate* the deſire and fruition of creature good, and *joy* as the *effect and reward* of that moderation) *but to the ſinner he giveth travel to gather together, and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This alſo is vanity and vexation of ſpirit.* It is apparent then that he who has no religion cannot truly *enjoy* his proſperity: and it is even more plain that he does not know how to make the *right uſe* of it. For what ſhould teach him this neceſſary part of knowledge? his *luſts* or his fancy will not. On the contrary, theſe being favoured by his outward circumſtances will hurry him into a thouſand inconveniencies, ſo that his proſperity ſhall be no other than an opportunity of doing more miſchief to himſelf and others. And as for his *reaſon*, he cannot wholly give himſelf up to the advice and conduct of that without being religious. This is the ground of the obſervation, [h] *the proſperity of fools* (men void of all true virtue and religion) *ſhall deſtroy them.* It awakens and feeds their corruptions, diverts and ſtifles every good thought, ſtrengthens the animal life, and renders their return to God by the ways of repentance and mortification more difficult.

[g] Eccleſ. ii. 26. [h] Prov. i. 32.

difficult. That a man may be the *better* for his prosperity, and *do good* in proportion to his abilities. 'tis necessary that he be under the constant influence of the rules and principles of religion.

AND then if we consider a man in *adversity*, *religion* is still *needful*; needful to *support* us in such a state, and to fit us for *receiving the advantage* which may be reap'd from it. Am I *afflicted* in my body by pain and sickness, in my worldly affairs by losses and disappoinments, in respect of my reputation by slanderous reports, in my neareſt relations and friends by their death, or by ill steps, or unhappy accidents in their lives? From whence can I fetch *comfort*, if the fountains of consolation which religion opens to its followers be shut up to me? if I cannot take refuge in the perfections and providence of God, the unchangeable nature and inestimable blessings of the gospel covenant, and the secret approbation of my own conscience? These things are the good man's support; but the soul which is a stranger to religion must be a stranger likewise to these comforts; they belong not to him. And which makes the case yet more unhappy, as he is without *comfort* in affliction, so uncapable of reaping that *benefit* from it which another does, who has his ear open to the instructions of heavenly wisdom.

wiſdom. The moſt thorny troubleſome way, the moſt calamitous condition, is with reſpect to ſuch a one the way to happineſs, and a means of preparing him for it. Which ſhows that religion is alike *needful* in *proſperity* and *adverſity*.—And I will add, is more eſpecially ſo in the *change* of life *from* one to the other; for in ſuch a change from a ſtate of proſperity to a ſtate of affliction, or, on the other hand, from affliction to proſperity, there is more than ordinary danger of our falling into ſome fatal ſnare, unleſs *religion* prevent. When a man finds himſelf all on a ſudden in a ſtate of proſperity, and inſtead of that pain and ſickneſs with which he was lately exerciſed, enjoys an uncommon meaſure of health and eaſe, how natural is it to be lifted up with it, to run into a ſenſual ſpirit and way of life, and to contract an immoderate fondneſs for the body and the world? when, on the contrary, he who was at eaſe in his body, and in his outward circumſtances, comes to be afflicted in both, how natural is it to be tempted to diſcontent, and to repining thoughts againſt God and his providence? In this caſe there is need of patience and chriſtian ſubmiſſion, as in the former of humility and moderation; but this moderation, this humility, this patience, are ſo many branches of *religion*, and grow out of *no* other *ſtock*. So

that a man is prepared or unprepared for the different ſtates and turns of life, according as he has a principle of religion in him, or is deſtitute of it; and is *more* or *leſs prepared* as he is *more* or *leſs religious*. *Religion* therefore is *the one thing needful* in this regard likewiſe, (*viz.*) as it is *needful* in *all conditions* and *changes* of life, in *proſperity* and *adverſity*, and in the *ſudden alterations* from one ſtate to another. Once more,

6. RELIGION is *the one thing abſolutely needful*, becauſe it is *needful to both worlds or ſtates of exiſtence*, the *preſent* and the *future*, and not *relative* to *this* world only, which may be ſaid of abundance of other things, yea, of all other things which have no immediate connection with religion, and influence upon it. Here is the chief teſt of all, by which we are to judge of what is *needful*, and of the *degrees* of its neceſſity. "Is it *needful* by way of *preparation* for the "world to come? And if ſo, how *far* does "it contribute to my preparation for that "world? For ſince there is another world "beſides this, (of which I am aſſured by "the joint teſtimony of reaſon and revela- "tion) and ſince my happineſs or miſery "there will vaſtly exceed all the good things "I can enjoy, or the evil things I can ſuf- "fer in this mortal life; it muſt be ma- "nifeſt to common ſenſe, that whatſoever is

"needful

" needful only for *this* life deſerves not to be " called needful, when compared with thoſe " things which are of abſolute neceſſity, in " order to obtain the happineſs or avoid the " miſery of an *everlaſting* ſtate."—Do but bring things to this teſt, and you will preſently ſee the infinite importance of religion above all other things. Are meat, and drink, and clothing, and habitations, reckoned among *neceſſaries?* 'Tis true they are ſuch in ſome ſenſe, but then 'tis only in a ſenſe reſtrain'd to *this* life; we therefore call them the *neceſſaries of life.* Of what life? of this *bodily*, this *momentary life.* But is this the *only*, or the *nobleſt* and moſt *important* life of man? neither one nor the other.—It is not our *only* life, ſince the ſoul has its life as well as the body, and a life of an intirely peculiar and diſtinct kind; a life which does not break off with that of the body, but ſtill runs on without any meaſure, except eternity itſelf. And as this life is not man's *only*, ſo neither his *moſt valuable* life; the life of the ſoul, or which is the ſame, the life to come, is of inconceivably greater conſequence to us (for this very reaſon, that it is a never-ending life, were there no other,) than the life of the body, by which we are tied to the world for a few years. For till you can find a proportion between time and eternity, between a finite and an infinite length

of duration, you will be able to find none between this life and the next. But beſides this, there is another difference to be conſidered, and that is the *intrinſic worth* and *excellence* of each life. This *bodily* life I enjoy in common with the *beaſts* of the field, in the life to come I am a partaker with *angels*; this life has joys and pleaſures, pains and ſorrows, which *juſt* touch the *ſurface* but do not enter *deep* into the ſoul; pleaſures *mixed* with pains, and pains with pleaſures, hopes with fear, and fears with hope; the enjoyments or the ſufferings of the following ſtate will poſſeſs me *intirely*, *penetrate* to the very *center* of my being, and exclude every thing of a contrary kind. If I am happy, it will be without any abatement of my happineſs, or fear of being deprived of it; if miſerable, it will be without any allay of my miſery, or hope of deliverance from that *everlaſting deſtruction* to which I ſhall be doomed. Say now, whether that is not deſervedly eſteemed needful, which has a direct ſubſerviency to this future everlaſting life? You cannot if you would deny this. Let me therefore beg you to carry the meditation a ſtep farther, and inquire whether *religion* be not the *very thing*, and the *only thing* which is thus needful. Suppoſe, what is far from being true, that ſenſual gratifications and worldly enjoyments are ſufficient

ficient to make me happy as long as this life ſhall laſt; yet do we think, or will we venture to affirm, that we ſhall be ever the happier for them after this life is ended? What, "when my ſoul is unclothed of its "body? when I am in the world of ſpi-"rits! and if I retain the deſires I con-"tracted in the body (which is poſſible "enough) yet I ſhall not have any one object "to gratify them: ſhall I not, on the con-"trary, be the more miſerable, as I have "more indulged to my fleſhly Inclinations, "and have enjoy'd more of what worldly "and voluptuous minds call happineſs?" This I think is too plain to be ſeriouſly doubted of. Let us therefore proceed to make the ſame inquiry concerning *religion*. What is the influence which *that* has upon my future exiſtence? Does that *promote* or *hinder* my *everlaſting* felicity? Need I return an anſwer to theſe queſtions, or rather do they not anſwer for themſelves? It is not a more undoubted truth that there is a ſtate of recompences beyond the grave, than that God has required ſome *qualifications*, and appointed ſome *means* for the obtaining and enjoying the happineſs of that ſtate. And I beſeech you, what other *qualification* can you think of beſides a *conformity* of *mind and heart* to the *will of God*, or the rules of *right reaſon?* which is no other than reli-

gion in its *root* or *principle*. Or what other *means* beſides *obeying the law* which God has given us, and *living to the glory* of his name? which includes all the practical part of religion, or the *fruits* and *effects* of *religion* in the *life*. Let me [i] *love God with all my heart, and with all my ſoul*, and be like him in the holy rectitude of my nature, and I cannot but be *qualified* for heaven and eternal glory: let me be *qualified* for heaven, and 'tis *impoſſible* I ſhould *miſs* the *enjoyment* of it; ſince he who *aſſiſts* me in obtaining the qualification, will certainly *beſtow* the reward for which his grace has qualified me. Let me follow the directions of the divine law, live as that enjoins me, and conſtantly obſerve all thoſe duties of religious worſhip which he has inſtituted; and herein I ſhall make uſe of thoſe *means* which God has appointed for the ſecuring of eternal life. And if I *uſe* the *means* which God has appointed, and uſe them after a *right* manner, I cannot poſſibly miſs of the *end*; foraſmuch as he who has *inſtituted* the *means*, has the abſolute *command* of the *end*, and has fixed an inſeperable *connection* between the one and the other. Here then let me look back a little: religion is *needful* for *both worlds*, needful with regard to this, ſtill more needful with reſpect to the next, therefore to be pronounc'd

[i] Matt xxii. 37.

pronounc'd the *one thing needful.* True it is, other things may have ſome influence upon my condition in the life to come; but then that is only *indirectly*, as they have an influence upon the ſtate and practice of religion in this; and ſo far they are of moment to me, and no farther. Whatever importance there is in other things, they borrow it all from religion. It may be they accidentally advance or retard my progreſs in religion; this I ſhould well conſider, and accordingly form my judgment and eſtimate of theſe things, avoiding every thing, or afraid of every thing which may be likely to ſet me back in my ſpiritual affairs; and putting a higher value upon things as under the bleſſing, and by the grace and aſſiſtance of God they conſpire to the growth of any good diſpoſition, or the more vigorous, careful and conſtant practice of any duty: becauſe as theſe things have a good or an ill influence upon the ſtate of my ſoul, ſo the good or bad, the better or worſe ſtate of my ſoul has an anſwerable influence upon the ſtate I ſhall paſs into after death.

I HOPE when all theſe conſiderations are duly weighed, (as they well deſerve our moſt ſerious regard) it will be own'd that I have abundantly proved my point, that *religion is the one thing needful*, being *abſo-*

lutely, univerſally, unchangeably, and everlaſtingly needful.

LET me now beg your attention while I ſuitably *apply* this moſt important truth.

1. RELIGION being apparently the *one thing needful*, how *happy* are all they who are *truly religious?* happy in that religion which employs their care is but *one thing*, and that this one thing is the *only thing needful.* Happy they are in this, that what principally employs their care is but *one thing*; for by this means they are at *greater certainty*, and more *free* from *diſtraction* than other men are. Their *certainty*, in regard of the thing they aim at, muſt be greater, ſince their immediate aim is to pleaſe God; and that they pleaſe God they are as certain, as they are of their deſire and endeavour to pleaſe him: foraſmuch as nothing does more pleaſe God than this deſire and endeavour to pleaſe him, when *unfeigned* and *prevailing*; virtually including all the parts of obedience, which are the natural reſult of this deſire. And is not this a ſingular happineſs, to enjoy the *greateſt certainty* in that affair which is of unſpeakably the *greateſt importance?* This cannot be ſaid of thoſe who are ſwallowed up of other cares, they have no ſuch certainty to boaſt of; being in danger, after all their care, of miſſing that to which all their cares and labours

labours are levelled : not only as they may be disappointed of their end by the righteous providence of God crossing and counteracting their designs, but as the means leading to their end are uncertain ; and of the many things necessary by way of means, if they happen to overlook any one, which they may easily do, all their labour is thrown away. Another advantage of the religious man, is, that with *more certainty* he has *less distraction*. His attention is not diverted by a thousand different views and aims, nor his heart torn with the endless conflict of warring passions, nor his life made uneasy by a vast number of thwarting interests and inconsistent pursuits. He minds one thing, and, comparatively speaking, no more than one thing ; and that is, how he may discharge a good conscience, and get safe to heaven. And then it greatly adds to the happiness of the truly pious and good man ; that when he reflects, he finds the thing about which he is most careful, is the very thing which most deserves his care ; and that the more he reflects and examines things, the more convinced he is of its being so. This is a satisfaction peculiar to such a one. His reason approves his care, approves it as superior to all other cares, and never condemns it as excessive. *One thing is needful*, needful in all these respects which can render

der any thing a fit object of his serious thoughts and concern; and this one thing he has secured, and therefore can have no just ground to be uneasy, possessing all things in this one; thus securing an interest in God, the sovereign possessor, and the wise disposer of all.

2. RELIGION being *the one thing needful*, what reason have we for *thanksgiving* to God for the *everlasting gospel* and the *ministry* thereof, by which we are fully instructed in what regards this most needful and momentous thing; both *what it is*, and *how* it may be *secured*. From the gospel we learn [k] *what pure undefiled religion is*; as to the *inward* part of it, that it is made up of faith, hope, love, humility, meekness, and the whole constellation of heavenly and divine graces, which conspire to perfect the image of God in the soul; as likewise what true religion is *in the life*, consisting in the acts and exercises of all those graces and virtues, the habits of which are seated in the hidden part, *i. e.* in a [l] *sober, righteous and godly life*, or in performing those several duties towards God, our neighbour, and ourselves, which are so particularly described and commanded in the word of God, and which we shall certainly perform if we are actuated

[k] James i. 27. Matt. xxii 37. Gal. v. 6, 22, 23. Rom. xiv. 17. [l] Tit. ii. 11, 12.

actuated by those good principles, from which the outward duties should flow. As the *habits* of grace are more immediately denoted by the *image of God*, so the *acts* proceeding from those habits are more expressly meant by the *life of God.* And O! how great a privilege is it to have the knowledge of those things communicated to us as it is in the *gospel?* to be inform'd from the *mouth* of *God himself* of what is needful for us to *be* and *do*, that we may obtain his favour, and in his favour and presence find the happiness we are seeking after? And when we add, that besides the discovery which the gospel has made of the *nature* of true religion, or the *terms* of *acceptance* with God; it has also directed us *how* we may come to be possess'd of those needful qualifications, and to perform this necessary condition call'd *religion*; namely, by fervent *prayer* to God, humble *reliance* on his mercy and grace through *Jesus Christ*, and exerting our own sincere *endeavours* under the *agency* of his *holy Spirit*; when, I say, we consider this, the gospel appears to be a complete method of salvation, and as such to challenge our highest esteem, our warmest gratitude, and our most incessant praises and thanksgivings. And if we would be duly sensible of the benefit we receive as by the gospel itself, so by the *ministry* of it,

and

and of the obligations we are under to be thankful for it; we ſhould conſider the miniſtry under *this* notion of it, as intended for our *inſtruction* in the *one thing needful*, and for the *exciting* us to mind and purſue it by laying the promiſes and threatenings of the goſpel before us; that we may not, on the one hand, be ignorant of our duty, or what God expects from us; or on the other, of the final iſſue, of what we are to hope or fear from God, according as we perform or neglect our duty. This is the great *end* of the *miniſterial office*, 'tis wholly converſant about the *one thing needful*; and from this view of it, appears to be a moſt neceſſary and beneficial inſtitution; which I think is a very good reaſon why we ſhould *prize* the miniſtry of the word, *diligently attend* upon it, and earneſtly endeavour to *profit* by it.

3. Religion being the *one thing needful*, let us be *perſuaded* to *conſider* and *treat* it as ſuch. This we muſt acknowledge to be altogether juſt, and reaſonable, ſince if we do not treat it *as it is*, or ſuitably to its nature and importance, we do not treat and regard it *aright*; and if we do not treat it aright, we muſt be *condemn'd* by our own *reaſon* and *conſcience*, as not acting worthy of that nature which God has given us, nor agreeable to his deſign in creating us; which

no

no doubt was, that we ſhould ſeek and find our happineſs in acting conformably to our *own* nature, and the *natures* of other things. If it be aſk'd, what is implied in *treating religion as the one thing needful*; I anſwer, we muſt,

1. RESOLVE to be religious *whatever it coſt us.* For, why do we reſolve upon any thing, but becauſe we apprehend that thing to be *needful* for us? So the *covetous* man reſolves upon getting *riches*, as eſteeming the greateſt happineſs of life to conſiſt in the abundance of wealth. Why do we make one thing give place to another, but becauſe the thing we prefer is, in our opinion, more needful than that we ſet aſide for the ſake of it? So the ſame covetous man ſacrifices his love of eaſe and pleaſure to his deſign of heaping up wealth, becauſe he accounts it more neceſſary for him to be rich, than to live at his eaſe; and therefore, ſince riches are not to be had without toil and parſimony, is contented to ſubmit to theſe that he may accompliſh his principal deſire. Now religion is the *one* thing *needful*, a thing of *abſolute* neceſſity; wherefore, if we believe this (unleſs we will act otherwiſe here than we do in all other parallel caſes) we ought to determine that nothing ſhall hinder us from being religious; reckoning, that if we ſhould purchaſe

chaſe this *pearl of price* with *all that we have*, we ſhould not buy it too dear. We may be tempted to forego our reſolution by the proſpect of the *difficulties* we muſt cope with, the oppoſition we muſt ſtruggle thro', the pains, the vigilance, the ſelf-denial, which the ſteddy proſecution of our purpoſe will require; but then, we ſhould conſider, that religion is infinitely more neceſſary than any or all of thoſe things which we muſt deny ourſelves for the ſake of it. "That there is not the ſame neceſſity for "indulging my *animal* part, that there is "for ſaving my *immortal* ſoul; for living "in pleaſure a *few* days, as for my being "happy *for ever*." God forbid therefore, we ſhould heſitate a moment in a point ſo manifeſt, or delay any longer in a matter of ſuch infinite importance! No; let every one ſay, "I am convinced of the abſolute ne-"ceſſity of religion for this life and the "next, if I deſire to be happy; and be-"ing thus convinc'd, I will pray to God "to ſtrengthen this conviction, and to en-"able me, by his grace, to live ſuitably to "it. I will not hearken to the importu-"nities of the fleſh, the enticements of ſin-"ful company, or the corrupt examples of "the world, but renounce all theſe, that "I may follow the calls of heavenly wiſ-"dom," Again,

2. IF

2. IF we would *treat religion as the one thing needful*, we are obliged to purſue our religious concernments with all that *ſerioufneſs* and *zeal*, which a thing of *abſolute* neceſſity demands from us. 'Tis ill trifling in *religion*, the nature of the thing is too ſacred and awful, and the conſequences too weighty to allow of it. He, who is not ſerious and attentive in thoſe actions which concern the life of his *ſoul*, and his *eternal happineſs*, when will he be ſo? An unguarded poſture of ſpirit in the worſhip of God, flat and lifeleſs devotions are inexcuſable. With fervour in the ſpecial duties of religion, we ſhould join an active diligence in redeeming our time, improving our talents, governing our own paſſions, and doing good to others as we have opportunity. The apoſtle has told us, that [m] *it is good to be zealouſly affected always in a good thing.* The only proper *object* of our *zeal* is ſomething good, and according to the degrees of goodneſs in the thing, ought to be the degree of our *zeal.* Now religion being *abſolutely needful*, has a kind of *infinite goodneſs*, for which reaſon our zeal, if directed to the promoting of true religion in ourſelves and in the world, and guided by prudence in the outward expreſſions of it, can never be exceſſive. O how active ſhould chriſtians be

[m] Galat. iv. 18.

be in the whole of a religious courſe, while, beſides thoſe other powerful motives which the goſpel ſets before us, they conſider the *nature* of religion as *the one thing needful.*

4. SINCE there is *but one thing needful*, and *religion* is *this one thing*, how great is both the *ſin* and *folly* of being *immoderately careful* about *other things*, and eſpecially about *many* ſuch things? Our Saviour's reproof of *Martha* is grounded upon this conſideration; *Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful.* "As well as I love thee, and even "*becauſe* I love thee, I cannot but chide "thee for thy thoughtleſs conduct, and be "angry with thee for ſo forgetting thy- "ſelf, that when all theſe cares which re- "gard the preſent life, are mere trifles, if "compared with the care of the *ſoul*, and "the *great things which pertain to the king-* "*dom of God*; inſtead of acting, as becomes "a wiſe perſon, when ſuch an opportunity "offers, thou ſhould'ſt be taken off from "thy chief concern, by a multitude of mean "and needleſs cares." And of this groſs inconſiſtency and indecorum, perſons, who are no ſtrangers to the power of religion, are too often guilty. And, if *they* are not wholly free from this charge, how much more faulty muſt thoſe of *another character* be, whoſe imaginations are *perpetually* working

ing about earthly things, and their very *hearts* and *ſouls* poſſeſſed by them? That we may not be thus careful, and troubled about many things, there are theſe *two general rules*, among others, which we ſhould heedfully obſerve; the not obſerving which is an argument of very egregious folly, and of too great remains of an earthly mind. We ſhould ſo *moderate* our *application* to all our *ſecular* affairs, as to *redeem* a reaſonable portion of *time* for the affairs of *religion* and *eternity*. This rule concerns our *outward* conduct. The other rule, which more immediately relates to the *temper* of our *minds*, is that we ſhould ſo *moderate* our *affection* to, and our *care* and *thoughtfulneſs* about the things of the *body*, and the *world*, as neither to *wrong* our *nobler* affections, to *unfit* ourſelves for the duties of our *high calling*, or *loſe* the *peace* and *quiet* of our breaſts; a loſs, for which we muſt blame ourſelves, and which no worldly gain or advantage can make up to us.

1. WE ſhould ſo *moderate* our *application* to all our *ſecular* affairs, as to *redeem* a reaſonable portion of our *time* for the affairs of *religion* and *eternity*. This rule concerns our *outward* conduct, and it is a rule founded in the ſtrongeſt reaſon, namely, *religion's being the only thing needful*, yet moſt notoriouſly violated. Is not this a contradiction of our

practice to our *principles?* which, in the *conſequence* of it, is vaſtly worſe than holding principles which naturally claſh with and over-power one another. I confeſs, our preſent frame and condition is ſuch, that the greater part of our time is unavoidably taken up in attendance on the body and the things relating to it; which is more eſpecially the caſe of thoſe in narrow circumſtances: but then none, and much leſs ſuch as have a greater command of their time, ſhould, from their riſing up, to their lying down, be inceſſantly employed in the drudgery of the world, or in hunting after worldly and ſenſual pleaſure. This is to be *cumbred* with *much ſerving* in a much worſe ſenſe than *Martha* was, which we *need not* be; I take leave to repeat it, that we *need not* (I except none) be ſo entirely devoted to our worldly buſineſs as to have no time left for *prayer*, and *reading*, and *ſelf-converſe:* not to mention thoſe little intervals in our buſineſs itſelf, which might be improved to very good purpoſe by *mental ejaculations*, and other inward exerciſes. And for thoſe who have time upon their hands, they will be without excuſe if they throw it away upon ſerving the fleſh or the world, rather than aſſign a conſcionable part of it to the *one thing needful.*

2. THE

2. THE next *rule*, which relates to the *temper* of our *minds*, is upon ſome accounts of greater conſequence than the former, being the ground of it; for let us mind our *inward* frame, and we ſhall ſoon learn to rectify what is amiſs in our *outward* conduct: now this rule is, that we ſo *moderate* our *affections* to, and our *care* and *thoughtfulneſs* about the things of the *body* and the *world*; as neither to *wrong* our *nobler* affections, to *unfit* ourſelves for the duties of our *high calling*, or *loſe* the *peace* and *quiet* of our boſoms.

OUR *affection* to *other* things muſt not be ſuch as to *wrong* the *affection* we owe to the *nobler* objects of religion. Every thing in religion is great and excellent, the *duties* it enjoins, and the *prize* it teaches us to aſpire after. Religion draws aſide the veil, and points out to us [n] *the things above*, on which therefore, we ſhould *ſet our affections and not on things on the earth:* for where ſhould our *beſt affections* be placed but upon the *beſt objects?* And what objects like thoſe of religion? The *bleſſed God*, to whom all our religion is directed, the *holy Jeſus*, by whom it is ſanctified and made acceptable to eternal life, and the *glories* of the *heavenly world*, which are the reward of it! Such affections as theſe, we ſhould cheriſh, and not ſuffer our love to

[n] Coloſſ. iii. 2.

the perishing riches and pleasures of the world to entrench upon them.

WE are farther to remember, that our care and thoughtfulness about the things of time, are to be so *moderated*, as not to *unfit* us for the *delightful* and *acceptable* discharge of the *duties of religion.* When we are anxiously *careful about many things*, and have our heads and hearts crowded with them; all the time we set apart for the exercises of devotion, turns to but small account. We have very little relish for them, and, of course, give little attention to them. It may be we cannot satisfy ourselves to go without prayer and reading, we therefore keep up a *round* of duties, and a *form* of religion; but, alas! so many worldly cares and thoughts have taken possession of our souls, that there is not a duty we perform but is haunted with them, and sometimes quite spoil'd: because, while we serve God with [o] *our lips, our hearts are far from him.* And what can we expect from a sacrifice without a *heart?* from presenting ourselves before the Lord, when the world thrusts in with us, and while we pretend to speak to God, we are really talking aside to that?

FINALLY, we are so to *moderate our care and thoughtfulness* about *earthly* things, as not by their means, to *lose* the *peace* and *tranqui-*

[o] Isa. xxix. 13.

traquility of our ſouls. God knows we are, in this ſenſe, too often *troubled about many things*, which is one reaſon of our Saviour's caution to his diſciples, not [p] *to take thought for the morrow, ſaying, what ſhall we eat, and what ſhall we drink, and wherewithal ſhall we be clothed?* We ſhould not diſquiet ourſelves about things of this nature, for ſaith he, *your heavenly father knoweth ye have need of theſe things.* Let *us* therefore *mind the one thing needful*, and we may be confident that *He* will not be *unmindful* and *regardleſs* of *us*, as to theſe *lower* concerns. " Why ſhould I ſuffer worldly cares to eat " out the very heart of all my enjoyments, " to pierce and wound my boſom as ſo " many thorns? Is not the *folly* of this con- " duct alike viſible with the *ſinfulneſs* of it? " Shall I be a foe to my own peace, by " giving admiſſion to thoſe fears, and per- " plexities, and ſollicitudes, which are " plainly ſome of the greateſt enemies to " it? Did ever any man hate his own re- " poſe, and prefer trouble to reſt? never " *formally* and *intentionally*; and why then " ſhould I act as if I did? Were I ſo " much concerned about *the one thing need-* " *ful* as I ought to be, the danger would " immediately ceaſe of my being over- " whelm'd with cares about things which

[p] Matt. vi. 25, &c.

" I ſhould ſee to bear no more proportion
" to theſe, than a moment does to endleſs
" ages, or a ſingle point to immenſity.
" And once I had ſettled this important
" affair, I ſhould need no more than to
" reflect on the happineſs of my condition,
" in order to be convinc'd I had no occaſion
" to trouble and torment myſelf about this
" and the other thing, which did not affect
" my intereſt in the favour of God, and
" the love of Jeſus, nor could retard my
" progreſs towards the perfection of virtue
" and felicity. Let my *preſent* condition,
" as to *ſenſe*, be never ſo wretched, and my
" proſpects into *future time*, never ſo *cloudy*,
" why ſhould I be ſo extremely caſt down
" about it? The main thing is ſecured,
" I have good ground to be ſatisfied of
" my *ſincerity* in religion; and as long as
" I have no reaſon to doubt of that, I can-
" not but eſteem myſelf *ſafe* and *happy*;
" *ſafe* under the *protection* of my heavenly
" Father, and *happy* in his *care* and *diſ-*
" *poſal*, in the *ſmiles* of his countenance,
" and the *hopes* of ſpending eternity in his
" preſence."

SER-

SERMON X.

The character of the poor in ſpirit deſcrib'd.

MATTH. v. 3.

Bleſſed are the poor in ſpirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

IN this and the two following Chapters is contain'd our Saviour's *ſermon on the mount*; ſo called, becauſe when he delivered it, *he went up into a mountain*, in order to avoid the throng of people who preſs'd upon him, and that he might have the greater advantage of ſpeaking to them. Here, being ſat down, his *diſciples came unto him*; both thoſe who were *profeſſedly* ſuch, and thoſe who had any inclination to *become* ſo, and for that end waited on his divine inſtructions. It is an obvious reflection, that as the *law* was deliver'd from a *mountain*, ſo

was this part of the *doctrine* of the *gospel*, but with none of those *terrible* circumstances which accompanied the former; perhaps to signify the *mild* and *gracious* nature of the gospel dispensation. The *Son* of *God* comes down from *heaven* to instruct *mankind*; and when *such* a *one* condescends to teach us, should we not be ready to learn? Since from the dignity of the speaker, and the extraordinary manner in which he was sent, we may be sure the things he proposes are of the greatest importance. We are all by *profession* the *disciples of Christ*, and therefore obliged to listen to his voice; for tho' he does not preach to us in *person*, as he did to the *Jews*, yet if we have faith we shall know his voice in the *word of truth*, in the *ministry* of the *gospel*, and the *operations* of the *holy Spirit*, and carefully follow him as *sheep* their *shepherd*. We shall pay the same regard to the things which Christ taught in the days of his flesh, as if we heard them immediately from his mouth; be willing to receive the counsels of heavenly wisdom, and resolved to submit to them; for such is the disposition and character of a *disciple* of *Jesus*.

LET us attend to our divine Master.—*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* "There are many no-
"tions of *blessedness* prevailing in the world,
"most

" moſt of them very wide of the truth. " But if you will hearken to me, I will " tell you *wherein* true bleſſedneſs lies; " even in the practice of thoſe virtues, " and being poſſeſt of thoſe diſpoſitions of " mind, which I am about to recommend " to you." From hence let us obſerve, that *happineſs* is the *fruit of virtue*, not the product of *chance*, much leſs of *vice* and *wickedneſs*. To be *good* is to be *happy*; both in the *nature* of things and by the *promiſe* of God there is a connection between theſe two. The connection may not be ſo viſible at preſent, but one time or other it ſhall be manifeſt to all. We may be as certain that [a] *it ſhall be well with the righteous* in the final iſſue, as we are that there is a [b] *righteous Lord who loveth righteouſneſs*, and governs the world by the *rules* of it. [c] *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* But that the righteous ſhould be *as* the wicked, this would not be *right*, and fit, and becoming. Did *reaſon* give us leſs aſſurance than it does of the happineſs of good men, yet we cannot doubt that they are bleſſed whom the *Son of God* has pronounced *bleſſed*. And here indeed is the ſureſt hold, here we have the cleareſt and the largeſt proſpect. We may be confident, without a revelation, that virtue and vice ſhall not fare *alike*; but that the virtues of

[a] Iſai. iii 10. [b] Pſal. xi. 7. [c] Gen. xviii. 25.

of such imperfect creatures as we are shall be rewarded with *complete* and *everlasting* felicity, is what we can no otherwise know than from the gospel. Such a happiness the gospel offers to all; not whether they seek for it or no, or tho' they seek it in the ways of the world. A man is not born to a happy existence as he is to an inheritance; nor is happiness thrown upon any one, as the things of this world often are, while he thinks nothing of it, and is doing nothing to procure it. Yea, he may seek and not find it; which is the case of all those who seek for it in earthly enjoyments of any kind. They may be very diligent in their business; but if the end of all this diligence is to get the world, and nothing else, their diligence is not a *christian*, but a *secular* virtue; and therefore entitled to no other reward than at present attends it, consisting in the things of this world, not in true happiness or satisfaction of mind. And if even the industrious are not happy, who are *industrious only* for this world; much less are they so who plunge themselves in a life of *sensuality*, being neither wise for the next world nor for this. Men of this character would be a burden to themselves, were there nothing else to make them so, but that they cannot tell what to do with their time. How much more then when their pleasures themselves

are

are of ſuch a nature as to beget ſhame and remorſe of conſcience, and a reſtleſs diſquietude of ſoul?

THERE is one *general* obſervation more which I would make upon theſe beatitudes, that the *characters* here enumerated by our Saviour, with the *beatitudes* belonging to them, are *not to be ſeparated.* Poverty of ſpirit, godly ſorrow, meekneſs, hungering and thirſting after righteouſneſs, mercifulneſs, purity of heart, and a quiet, peaceable temper, are not marks and properties of ſo many *diſtinct* perſons; one of whom poſſeſſes one of theſe virtues, and is therefore intitled to the bleſſedneſs annexed to it, and another another; but of the *ſame* man. There is no true chriſtian but hath *all* the ſame graces and virtues that any other chriſtian hath, tho' not in the ſame perfection. One may excel in this quality, another in that; but while he excels in one particular virtue, he is utterly deſtitute of none. It is true, a very pious and good man may have no foundation at all in his natural temper for the exerciſe of ſome virtues; on the contrary, his natural temper may lean quite the other way; not to a meek, and patient, and forgiving behaviour, but to angry reſentments; not to mercifulneſs, but ſeverity; not to the contempt of the world, but the immoderate love of it: and by this means he may not appear

appear to others to have that virtue which he really hath. God alone, who knows upon what principles every man acts, and what conflicts and ſtruggles he ſuſtains, is a proper judge of the *degrees* of virtue and goodneſs to which any one has attained. This is not ſaid to excuſe thoſe, all whoſe actions proclaim them to be ſtrangers to humility, meekneſs, mercifulneſs, and other virtues of the chriſtian life; but as a caution to all not to be too forward in cenſuring perſons as intirely void of this and the other virtue, becauſe being naturally inclined to the contrary, they do not practiſe thoſe virtues with ſo much freedom and uniformity, or in the abundant meaſure as it may be ſome other chriſtians do.

I NOW come directly to treat the text, in which we have two things conſiderable.

I. THE *character* of the *true diſciples of Jeſus Chriſt*; they are *poor in ſpirit*.

II. THEIR *bleſſedneſs*; *theirs is the kingdom of heaven:* of each in its order.

1. WE have here the *character* of a *genuine diſciple of Chriſt*. He is *poor in ſpirit*; a phraſe capable of theſe two interpretations; either, 1. That he has a *temper* of mind *ſuited* to a ſtate of *poverty*; or, 2. That he is *humble* in *mind*.

1. BY

1. BY being *poor in ſpirit* may be meant, that a man has a *temper* of mind *ſuited* to a *poor* and *low* condition. For, that the word *ſpirit* does ſometimes denote not the *ſpirit itſelf*, but a certain *diſpoſition* or *temper* of ſpirit, is plain to thoſe who read the ſcriptures with any care, as it is agreeable enough to the common uſe of the word. And if we underſtand the word in this ſenſe, it will be very natural to conceive, that by being *poor in ſpirit* our bleſſed Saviour may intend a diſpoſition of mind *adapted* to a ſtate of *want* and *meanneſs*. And how may ſuch a diſpoſition be known? I think, without much difficulty. To be in this ſenſe *poor in ſpirit*, a man muſt be in great meaſure *indifferent* to the *world*, and to all things in it. His *notions* of the world muſt not run high; nor his *deſires* after it be eager and impatient. He muſt not think that the [d] *life of man*, (*i. e.* the happineſs of life) *conſiſteth in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth*; for if he does, he is badly fitted to bear the want of theſe things; ſince 'tis hardly poſſible that any one ſhould be ſo little a lover of himſelf, as to be content to be unhappy, I mean ſo upon the whole. What I think neceſſary to my happineſs, I cannot be very eaſy to want; how then does the world ſtand

[d] Luke xii. 15.

ſtand in my eſteem, after what manner am I affected to it? St. *John* has given us the world's inventory in a few words, [e] *the luſt of the fleſh, and the luſt of the eye, and the pride of life*, i. e. pleaſures, riches, honours. What are my thoughts of the *pleaſures* of this world? that there is no enjoyment, no happineſs without them, that life has no reliſh but what it receives from theſe pleaſures? If ſo, I am not *poor in ſpirit*. I muſt be of another ſpirit, or poverty will appear a very terrible thing to me; ſince the poorer I am, the leſs I ſhall be able to command theſe pleaſures. It is not for a poor man to think of living in pleaſure. Pleaſure is an expenſive thing, and therefore to be left to men of wealth. And what value then do I put upon *wealth*, and upon thoſe who are diſtinguiſhed by it? In the language of the world, bleſſed are the rich and none elſe; do I ſpeak the ſame language? 'Tis certain that riches will procure a great many other things; there are indeed few things in the world but may be purchaſed this way. But is it our opinion that *happineſs* is in this number? alas, we muſt not then pretend to be the *diſciples* of *Chriſt*, whoſe bleſſedneſs muſt ariſe out of other notions of things, and from quite different inclinations. Perhaps we are not among the *adorers*, or even the *admirers*

[e] 1 John ii. 16.

admirers of wealth for its *own ſake*; but can we ſay the ſame of *praiſe*, and *honour*, and *outward reſpect?* Do we ſet our hearts upon theſe things; cannot we, not upon any terms, be eaſy without them? If this be the caſe, the title of *poor in ſpirit* does not belong to us, we could never be reconciled to a poor condition: the poor man's cottage lying quite out of the road of honour and greatneſs; and but little external reſpect being pay'd to the poor man himſelf, how *rich* ſoever he may be in the poſſeſſions of the mind. But how ſhall I be certain that I am thus indifferent to the world in my eſtimate of its enjoyments, and the affections of my mind to them? Were the queſtion concerning *another* perſon, the only way of diſcovering this would be by the *outward actions.* Does a man for the ſake of the world break any of God's commandments? does he violate the rules of conſcience and equity, lye, and ſteal, and defraud? hath he made it his reſolution that he [f] *will be rich* by one method or other? it is impoſſible to doubt of ſuch a man's notions. As to *ourſelves*, beſides our actions, even the moſt ſecret of them, which are hidden from other men, we have the *ſenſe* and *feeling* of our own minds to direct us. If we reflect upon what paſſes within, can we not tell which we

[f] 1 Tim. vi. 9.

we prize moſt, a good conſcience, or the good things of this world? which of theſe we are moſt careful to ſecure, and can be moſt contented to enjoy without the other? One would think, that nothing more is neceſſary to a man's determining ſuch queſtions, but his being faithful to his own ſoul. Upon the whole, I infer that a man is not to be judged of one way or the other by his *outward* condition. His condition in the *world* hath nothing to do with the ſtate of his *ſoul*, or his condition in the *ſight* of God. The character muſt always be taken from the *reigning* part of the *mind*, which does not conſtantly follow a man's *worldly* circumſtances. A rich man ſhall not be condemned *becauſe* he is *rich*, nor the poor man be abſolved *becauſe* he is *poor*. For

1. IT may ſo happen, that one who *abounds* in this world's goods may be *poor in ſpirit*, i. e. may have a ſpirit *ſuited* to a *ſtate* of poverty. Tho' [g] *riches increaſe he may not ſet his heart upon them*; he may neither *value himſelf* upon the account of theſe external advantages, nor *undervalue* thoſe who want them. His ſoul may be free and diſengaged, his deſires after any worldly comfort moderate, and ſo likewiſe his delight and joy in it. And for the ſame reaſon as he is *moderate* in the *enjoyment* of riches,

[g] Pſal. lxii. 10.

riches, he would be *contented* if God ſhould *deprive* him of them; and would have been ſo, if they had been always *denied* him. It is true, we hear our Saviour ſaying, [h] *Wo unto you that are rich, for ye have received your conſolation*; i. e. if this was the *beſt* that could be ſaid of them that they were *rich*, they were but *miſerable* perſons; having no farther *conſolation* to expect, than that which they had already received, and in which they plac'd their chief felicity. Beſides which, it might be our Saviour's intention in theſe words, to intimate the *great danger* of a rich and proſperous *condition*, by means of the many *temptations* which attended it. As he who ſails on a coaſt filled with rocks and ſhoals had need take a great deal of care if he would not be ſhipwreck'd, ſo muſt the rich man: and if he is thus watchful, and ſo preſerves himſelf [i] *unſpotted of the world*, which, tho difficult, is not impoſſible, his riches, inſtead of depretiating his virtue, add to the value of it, and ſupply him with opportunities of exerciſing himſelf in the moſt God-like work, which is that of *doing good*.

2. THE man whoſe *condition* is *poor* may not be *poor in ſpirit*. He may be poor and wicked, poor and diſcontented; have made himſelf poor by his vices, or keep himſelf

[h] Luke vi. 24. [i] James i. 27.

poor by his ſloth and idleneſs: he may envy thoſe who are above him, and make uſe of unlawful means to extricate himſelf out of his mean and low condition. Inſtead of accommodating himſelf to the circumſtances he is in, and being an example of thoſe virtues which ſhould adorn them, and would make *poverty* itſelf look *lovely*, he may carry it very indecently towards *men*, and quarrel with the *Providence* of God. Certainly when Chriſt ſays [k] *Bleſſed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God*; he cannot mean ſuch poor as theſe: but what is wanting in one evangeliſt muſt be ſupplied from another; *Bleſſed be ye poor*, that is, ye who are *poor in ſpirit*. And it is not unlikely that our Saviour uſes the term *poor* to ſignify, that they who are *outwardly poor*, have ordinarily greater advantages to become *poor in ſpirit*, than thoſe who enjoy the ſuperfluities of life. But ſtill 'tis not a man's *outward condition*, but the *temper* of the *mind* which renders him acceptable in the ſight of God. And as to the *temper* of the *mind*, a man muſt not charge the *want* of any virtuous diſpoſition, or his being under the *power* of any vitious one, upon his *circumſtances* in the *world*; for let theſe be what they will, they do not lay him under a neceſſity of being a wicked man, or doing wicked things.

[k] Luke vi. 20.

things. A man may *behave* as a *diſciple of Chriſt*, and may be *really* ſuch in any condition; ſince, as every condition has its temptations of one kind or another, ſo there is no condition the temptations of which are inſuperable. And if it be ſaid that they are ſuperable by the *grace* of God, but *not* elſe; I anſwer, this is very true; and it is no leſs true, that *all* may have this *grace* who aſk and improve it.

LET us therefore ſet ourſelves in earneſt to practiſe this *contentedneſs* of *mind*, this *abſtraction* of *heart* from worldly things. Let us [l] *learn in whatever condition we are therewith to be content*; not to ſtretch our wiſhes beyond what is convenient for us, and what God is pleaſed in the courſe of his Providence to beſtow upon us; but to [m] *be contented with ſuch things as we have*, tho' it be only *food and raiment*; nay, and to be prepar'd for a ſtate of the greateſt want and penury; that it may appear our happineſs is not the ſame as that of worldly minds, nor the meaſures by which we eſtimate the worth of things like theirs: that we prefer ſpiritual things to temporal; and for the ſake of the former are ready, at any time, to forego the latter; to forſake all things rather than forſake our duty, or be ſeparated from the love of God in our Saviour. The content-

[l] Phil. iv. 11. [m] Heb. xiii. 5.

ment and moderation here meant is a *chriſtian grace*, the *fruit* of the *Spirit*, the offſpring of divine and heavenly principles, not a mere *felicity* of *nature*. It muſt proceed from a mind enlightned with the knowledge of God, a deep conviction of the ſuperior excellence of the ſoul above the body, a prevailing affection to the beſt things, and an intire reſignation of ourſelves to the wiſe appointments of Providence. If ſuch be the *temper* of our minds, and ſuch the *principles* upon which it is founded, we are among *the poor in ſpirit* who have the *kingdom of heaven* for their *portion*.

2. THIS expreſſion of *poor in ſpirit* has another meaning, which, to me, ſeems the *principal*, and that is *humbleneſs of mind*. In the former ſenſe he is *poor in ſpirit* who hath a mean opinion of the *world*; in this, he who has a *low* one of *himſelf*. Not that *humility* obliges a man to wrong the truth, or himſelf, by entertaining a worſe opinion of himſelf than he really deſerves. The command is only this, that [n] *a man think not more highly of himſelf than he ought to think, but that he think ſoberly according to the proportion of thoſe gifts* with which God has intruſted him. *Humility* is not built upon *falſehood*, that is peculiar to *pride*, which, in its very eſſence, is ignorance and miſtake;

[n] Rom. xii. 3.

miſtake; while nothing promotes humility ſo much as a *true* notion of one's ſelf. Let us view ourſelves in a juſt light, and it is impoſſible but we muſt be humble. Our good actions and our good qualities are too inconſiderable to need being leſſened, as our faults, and errors, and weakneſſes are (God knows, and we ourſelves may eaſily know) too great and numerous to need our magnifying or multiplying them. Nor is a man obliged to *treat himſelf with contempt* in his *words* and *actions*, any more than to *undervalue* himſelf in his *thoughts*. An *affectation* of bearing hard upon one's ſelf, and being thought blind to every thing valuable of our own, while we take care that *others* ſhall not *overlook* it; tho' it court the *alliance* of humility, and is ſometimes miſtaken for it, is much nearer akin to *pride*. Now it has very much the appearance of *affectation*, when a man ſays in his own *diſpraiſe* ſuch things, as others know, or he himſelf believes to be *falſe*. And that which betrays the affectation to every bodies notice, is the manifeſt uneaſineſs or diſappointment of thoſe perſons who love moſt to run themſelves down, when others do not *contradict* them; a plain ſign that their cenſures of themſelves are only ſo many baits to catch the praiſes of others. The ſame may be ſaid of a man's *dreſs*, and *outward appear-*

ance, in which there is no neceſſity of his being ridiculous, or mean, or ſlovenly, in order to prove himſelf *humble*; nay, an induſtrious care to *ſeem* humble by *ſingularity* in any of theſe things, is the very *guiſe* of pride, and uſually diſcovers itſelf in hard and unchriſtian reflections upon others who do not follow our humour. Exceſs or defect in theſe matters is each an argument of *pride*; an example of which latter the *Moraliſt* gives in the people of *Lacedæmonia*, who were famous for the *plainneſs* of their *habits*, but not ſo remarkable for their *humility*. I make no doubt, but ſome who are truly humble may eſteem it a point of conſcience to ſpeak deſpicably of themſelves, and to forbear every thing which may ſet off their perſons in the eye of the world; tho' it be no more than what is modeſt and decent, and what their condition and circumſtances in life do warrant, if not require. But then this is plainly a *miſtake*, which however innocent it may be as to themſelves, has an *ill effect* as to their humility; which might be as great as it is now, without expreſſing itſelf after this manner, and would be much more reſpected by the world.

NOR, finally, does *humility* import that the humble man is *quite dead* to all *praiſe* and *honour*, much leſs that he has an *averſion* to it, and induſtriouſly declines it. To be

be ſure whoever ſeeketh the *praiſe of men more* than *that honour which cometh from God*, is altogether unacquainted with the virtue of *humility*; as he ſhows himſelf to be very defective in it, who is continually hunting after praiſe, aud is extremely afflicted if he miſſes of it, and in a manner inconſolable if he falls, tho' undeſervedly, under reproach and contempt. But *all* deſire of a *good* name, or even of a *great* one, in ſome caſes and ſituations, cannot be culpable; for then God would not have planted this deſire in the mind of man. There can be no crime in what is ſtrictly *natural*; and that a deſire to be well thought and well ſpoken of, within proper limitations, is ſo, is highly probable from its being ſo *univerſal*. We are told by the *wiſe man*, that [o] *a good name is better than precious ointment*; and by his father *David*, that [p] *the righteous ſhall be had in everlaſting remembrance:* and is not every thing that is *good*, as *ſuch* deſirable? or ſhould we find things commended in *ſcripture*, and propos'd by way of reward, if they were not at all to be aim'd at?—— But to proceed to a more *poſitive* deſcription of *humility*. And here we muſt always remember, that *humility* is an *internal* endowment, it has its abode in the *ſpirit* of man, all the thoughts and motions of which are

[o] Eccleſ. vii. 1. [p] Pſal. cxii. 6.

regulated by it. In general, it consists in having a *proper attention* to our *real selves*, so as not to set up an *imaginary self* in the room of that which is real; a *self* which owes its being to a *deluded* fancy, not to the *creating* hand of God; and is cloth'd and adorned according to the fondness of *our* wishes, not the truth and exactness of *things*. *Humility* is not to be impos'd upon by such an empty shadow, tho' *pride* may. The *humble* man is sincerely desirous to know *himself*, is afraid of being deceived in points of less importance relating to his *natural* or *moral* character, and much more in what is *essential*. He keeps a watchful eye upon the motions of *self-love*, and the approaches of *flattery* from other men, lest they should betray him into a foolish complacency. " O " Thou omnipresent and omniscient Being, " who knowest my inmost frame, next to " the knowledge of *thine* adorable perfec- " tions teach me to know *myself*, what I am " by thy original gift, and what by the im- " provement or abuse of it! O let me not " deceive myself, let me not be deceived by " others! What I *really* am I shall at *last* " appear to be; nothing but reality will " pass in the other world, as nothing but " what is real can have that appearance now " before the all-knowing God! I am sen- " sible that as in other things, so in my *e-*

" *steem*

" *ſteem* of my *own Being*, and the *poſſeſſions* " of it, I am prone to miſtake. The greater " the *danger*, the more ſhall be my *care*, that " ſo whatever deluſions I labour under of " this kind, they may not be fatal or very " groſs; and tho' I cannot *intirely* guard a- " gainſt the inſinuations of *pride*, yet *humi-* " *lity* may be my reigning character; and " I may not only have reaſon upon the " whole to acquit myſelf, but may have a " good report of the truth alſo, and praiſe " from God."

THIS is a *general* account of *humility*, but it may be neceſſary to be more *particular*. *Humility* then conſiſts in the following inſtances of *temper* and *conduct*.

1. IN not attributing to *ourſelves* any *excellency* or *good* which we *have not*. A humble man is not rich in *fancy*, and poor in *reality*; he does not fancy himſelf poſſeſs'd of any excellencies of body or mind which he has not; whether ſtrength, beauty, judgment, good nature, piety, or the like. *Humility* takes the *beam* out of *his* eye, which made him ſee his own virtues and other mens faults *double*. We read in ſcripture of a man's only *ſeeming to have* a thing, or *thinking* that he has it. [q] *Whoſoever hath not, from him ſhall be taken away even that which he ſeemeth to have.* He but *ſeemeth* to have it, and he

[q] Luke viii. 18.

he ſhall not long have it in this *ſeeming* manner. So there is one [r] *who ſeemeth to be wiſe*, who muſt *become a fool that he may be wiſe*. He muſt ſtrip himſelf of his conceited wiſdom, if he would avoid that *wo* which is pronounced againſt [s] *thoſe who are wiſe in their own eyes, and prudent in their own ſight*. This is a very common caſe for a man to [t] *deceive himſelf*, by *thinking himſelf to be ſomething when he is nothing*; ſomething as to *chriſtianity* in general, when he is nothing, utterly unacquainted with the *ſpirit* and *power* of religion; or ſomething as to this or that particular *endowment* or inſtance of *uſefulneſs* in the church of Chriſt, when he is a perfect ſtranger to it. Againſt theſe deluſions of pride the *humble* man is ſecur'd by an impartial ſtudy of himſelf, and a juſt eſtimate of his real abilities and excellencies; in forming which he will not only regard the favourable judgment of his *friends*, but make his advantage of the *cenſures* of his *enemies*.

2. *Humility* conſiſts in *not overrating* any *good* we *poſſeſs or do*. It is peculiar to this virtue that it repreſents things as *they are* in their own diminutions and native colours; while *pride* draws every object *bigger* and more *beautiful* than the life. It not only multiplies, but magnifies our *virtues*, making them

[r] 1 Cor. iii. 18. [s] Iſa. v. 21. [t] Gal. vi. 3.

them greater as well as more than they truly are. Is it ſo that a man is not altogether *void* of ſincere goodneſs? unleſs his *pride* is well ſubdued, he is in danger of conceiting himſelf more *advanced* in goodneſs and piety than he really is. But in proportion as *humility* prevails, the figure he makes in his own eyes ſhrinks, and he returns to his own proper ſtature, to which *pride* had made conſiderable additions. To prevent a wrong judgment, he not only conſiders his preſent ſeeming eminence in any virtue, and readineſs to practiſe it; but conſiders alſo what peculiar *advantages* from natural conſtitution, from education, and from the goſpel he enjoyed for acquiring this virtue; thinks how often, notwithſtanding theſe, he hath fail'd in it; and whether his improvements, after all, are proportioned to his peculiar advantages: and if he finds they are not, he lowers his notion of himſelf, and places himſelf in rank below another, who, tho' in appearance leſs eminent, yet, all circumſtances duly weigh'd, hath made a greater improvement in this virtue than he has done. 'Tis difficult to preſerve a juſt medium in the judgments we form of ourſelves, and avoid each extreme, of *too great ſeverity* on the one hand, believing we have not made that progreſs in religion which we really have; or of *partiality* on the other, having too high

high a notion of our ſpiritual proficiency. Of theſe two extremes, the latter is the moſt common, and as much more *dangerous* than the former, as *pride* is worſe and more to be dreaded than dejection of ſpirit. Hath the *humble* man acquitted himſelf well upon any occaſion, diſcharg'd his duty, done another a kind office, or been ſerviceable in a good cauſe? he does not vaunt himſelf as if no one elſe had done like him; he does not think the world has ſo much need of him that it cannot be without him, or is ſo much obliged that it can never be out of his debt. It is not his way to endeavour to bring a cloud over the good actions of another, and to place his own in the moſt conſpicuous point of view, that they may ſhine and glitter in the eye of the world. He is ſenſible that, take the matter at beſt, he has done *but* what he *ought* to do, and that he ſhould have been much to blame if he had not done it, been wanting in his duty both to God and man.

3. HUMILITY conſiſts in *not taking* an *inordinate delight* in *one's ſelf*. The *proud* man is his own idol, to which he is perpetually offering incenſe; he is one of the moſt pleaſant objects of his own contemplation, ever gazing on the dear image of himſelf reflected by his own imagination, and with as much ſelf-complacency as *vain* perſons behold

behold their beauty in a flattering glaſs. The *humble* man knows how to imploy his time better than in ſurveying and telling over his perfections and exploits, as a *miſer* does his money. The ſcripture indeed ſpeaks of ſuch a thing as [u] *a man's having rejoicing in himſelf, and not in another*; and the Apoſtle *Paul* in particular, ſpeaking of himſelf and the other Apoſtles, ſaith, that [w] *this was their rejoicing, even the teſtimony of a good conſcience, that in ſimplicity and godly ſincerity they had their converſation in the world.* This joy having a juſt foundation cannot be criminal, it is as reaſonable as it is refreſhing. But the pleaſure which ariſes from the teſtimony of a well-inform'd conſcience will not ſatisfy the *proud* man, his pleaſure is of another kind; the entertainment of an *empty* and *fooliſh* mind, not the ſatisfaction of a *ſober* and *rational* one. It renders him ſecure and careleſs, and by that means expoſes him to a great deal of danger. He is ready to ſay in the fulneſs of his joy, *ſoul take thine eaſe*, thou haſt nothing to do but indulge thyſelf in the ſweet amuſement and pleaſure, which thy ſpiritual attainments give thee. Whereas the *humble* man, if upon an impartial examination of his temper and conduct, he can ſee reaſon to approve himſelf, and is cheer'd with the joys of a good conſcience; he

[u] Gal. vi. 4. [w] 2 Cor. i. 12.

he is yet so sensible of his defects, and how far short he falls of the perfection of goodness, that [x] *forgetting the things which are behind he presses forward*; and instead of wasting time in pleasing contemplations on what he hath *already* acquired, he thinks it to be as nothing in comparison of what is yet *before* him, of those degrees of piety and holiness he might and ought to attain.

4. HUMILITY consists in not taking to ourselves *more* of the *praise* of any thing laudable than *belongs* to us. If we have any good in us we are to consider who wrought it; if any good has been done by us, who gave us the power to do it. [y] *What have we that we have not* (in one sense or other, either more immediately or remotely) *received? and if we have received it, why should we glory as if we had not received it?* The *humble* person looks even upon his good actions not in the nature of *merit*, but of a *debt*, or farther obligation to God for that *assistance* to which they are in a great degree to be ascribed. "Thanks be to God by "*whose grace I am what I am*, and have "been enabled to do the good which I "have done; without his grace I had been "nothing!" Like St. *Paul*, he may be able to say, that [z] *the grace bestowed upon him has not been in vain*; that the more grace he

[x] Phil. iii. 14. [y] 1 Cor. iv. 7. [z] 1 Cor. xv. 10.

he has received, *the more abundantly he has laboured:* but then he forgets not to add after the example of that great and humble *Apoſtle, yet not I* (not I alone, and in my own ſingle ſtrength) *but the grace of God which was with me.* And as to the intereſt which *other men* have in our virtues and attainments, *humility* is not unwilling to acknowledge it. He that glories in his acquiſitions, as if they were all made upon his own *independent* ſtrength and wiſdom, when he has been indebted to the writings, inſtructions, aſſiſtances, and labours of other men, is a *proud*, not a *humble* man. Gratitude to God and man is an eſſential ingredient in humility; ſo that in being backward to own that we have been obliged to the aids of *divine grace*, the favourable influences of God's Providence, and the *counſel* and *aſſiſtance* of our friends and others, we diſcover our deficiency in this excellent virtue. We have an admirable example of the contrary, and worthy to be propoſed to our imitation tho' he was an heathen; the perſon I mean is the *Roman Emperor and Philoſopher Antoninus*, who, in his *meditations*, takes notice very ingenuouſly, " that from his *grand-father* he " learnt ſuch virtues, from his *mother* ſuch, " from his *tutors* ſuch, from ſeveral of his " *friends* whom he particularly names ſuch " and ſuch; and, ſaith he, to God I ſtand in-

" debted

" debted that I had good anceſtors, good pa-
" rents, a good ſiſter, good tutors, good friends,
" and, in ſhort, all other good things."

5. HUMILITY conſiſts in a *lively ſenſe* and *unfeigned acknowledgment* of our many *imperfections* and *ſins*; our *natural* and our *moral* defects and diſorders.

1. OF our *natural* defects; that our Being is precarious, that we were intirely dependent for it on the pleaſure of God. It was but yeſterday and we were not, our whole Being was from nothing. *We could not have exiſted without the leave of another*, does not expreſs the *whole* truth of our caſe; ſince, without the *almighty* power of that other, *exerted* in order to our production, we could never have been. And as for our *bodies*, they were immediately [a] *taken out of the duſt*; they had the ſame common original with the bodies of the meaneſt reptile. *Duſt they were*, and we may add, *to duſt they ſhall return*. As we might not have been at all, ſo, for our *continuance* in Being, we depend upon the will of another, who, if he pleaſed, could the very next moment turn us back into our firſt nothing. And as to this *animal* life, 'tis certain that we ſhall loſe it in a very little while more, and in this reſpect may [b] *ſay to corruption, thou art my father; and to the worm, thou art my brother*

[a] Gen. iii. 19. [b] Job xvii. 14.

ther and my sister. Numberless *accidents* attend the present life, the most inconsiderable of which may be sufficient to destroy life itself; and when it does not effect that, yet to lessen, if not quite take away the comfort of life. We are besieged and attack'd by a troop of diseases, with death for their leader. There are a thousand things which concur to mortify our pride, and to make us, the *children* of the *earth*, humble, when we reflect on our bodies; the infirmities which surround them, the pains to which they are liable, the changes which usually befal them in the course of time; from strength to weakness, from the bloom and activity of youth, to the deformities, languidness, and various complaints of age: and yet even of *these* bodies are we too often *proud*, tho' the considerations are so many and so obvious which should teach us *humility*.

BUT it may be said the *soul* is *another* sort of Being, both in its *original* and in its *nature* widely different from the body, being *reasonable* and the *offspring of God*, *designed* and *naturally fitted* for *immortality*. True—yet to whom do we *owe* this excellence of nature, and on whom does it continually depend? not to or upon ourselves, but the great [c] *Father of spirits* before whom

[c] Heb. xii. 9.

therefore we ſhould be humble; ſince he who ſpake us into reaſon and life, can ſpeak us into ſtupidity and eternal death. The *ſoul* alſo hath its *imperfections*, eſpecially in the preſent ſtate. *Comparatively* ſpeaking, how ſmall is the extent of its power or knowledge, ſhut up in the priſon of a body, fetter'd with unwieldy limbs of fleſh, bred up in falſe opinions, and in the midſt of deluſive appearances? We have not been long enough upon the ſcene to know much of it. We know little of ourſelves, or of the objects about us. *Truth* is a boundleſs region, of which a very ſmall part is yet diſcover'd by ages paſt, or will be diſcovered in ages to come; and even this little is unknown to the greater part of mankind. And if it ſhould be thought that the temptation to *pride* is ſo much the greater with regard to thoſe few who excel the reſt of mankind in the accompliſhments of *knowledge*; I anſwer, the temptation to pride may be greater, but not the reaſon for it; ſince thoſe who know moſt are beſt able to judge of their own ignorance, and their many other defects. How very *ſcanty* is our *knowledge* in thoſe very things which concern the comfort and happineſs of life, what is *good* and what is *evil?* and much more how to provide the one and guard againſt the other? And were our knowledge greater, it would not fully anſwer

ſwer the purpoſe, as long as our *power* continued ſo *bounded*; for alas, what is it we are able to do for ourſelves? And tho' we have an almighty and ever watchful Providence to which we may truſt, (which to every ſerious and good mind is a thought that affords great ſatisfaction,) yet this ſurely is no argument for *pride*, but for *humility* and thankfulneſs.

2. LET us take a brief view of our *moral* defects and diſorders. Our *underſtandings* are *dark* and *narrow*; but this is not the worſt that can be ſaid, nor ſo humbling as the *want of rectitude* in our *moral* capacity, the ingratitude, and other evil diſpoſitions of our hearts, the perverſeneſs of our wills, the miſgovernment of our affections, the weakneſs and inconſtancy of our good reſolutions, the irregularities of our lives, and the defectiveneſs of our beſt actions. Is this the creature ſo prone to be *proud?* It is true on the one hand, if he was not thus vitious there would be leſs room for pride; but on the other, the more vitious he is, the more occaſion he has to be humble. What a ſtrange kind of compoſition is this thing we call *pride!* a *defect*, a *vice* which grows out of the imagination of our virtues and perfections; and at the ſame time could hardly find entrance into the ſoul, were it not that our imperfections and vices are ſo many, and our perfections

and virtues so few. We are *sinners* before God; we have not only the guilt of many sinful actions lying upon us, but these sinful actions leave the most unhappy effects behind; they beget evil *habits*, and by this means polute, enslave, and harden the heart; incline it to that which is evil, and more and more incapacitate it for that which is good. And under all this guilt and disorder shall we not be *humble?* Let us only study our selves thoroughly and we shall; for *humility* is nothing else but a *deep conviction*, and *suitable acknowledgment* to God of our follies, imperfections and sins; of our unworthiness of the favour of God, and our liableness to his displeasure and condemnation. — These *five particulars* contain a short description of *humility*. The first four are comprehended in *scripture* under the term σωφροσυνη, *sober-mindedness*; for to be *sober-minded* is not to *attribute* to ourselves any *excellency* or *good* which we *have not*;—*not* to *over-rate* any good which we *possess* or *do*,—*not* to take any *inordinate delight* in *ourselves*; —nor to *assume* to ourselves *more* of the *praise* of any *laudable* quality or action than *belongs* to us.—This *is sobriety of mind*, at least, is the most direct meaning of the word. And O, how lovely is this sort of temperance, and how reproachful and odious the contrary, not less so than that *external* virtue

tue or vice to which we commonly give thoſe names! Not to be guilty of *exceſſes* in the uſe of the *good things* of *this life*, but always to obſerve the rules of the exacteſt temperance, adds an amiableneſs to a man's character; and is it not the ſame when he is temperate in the enjoyment of the *good things* which belong to his own Being? The *word* uſed to expreſs the *laſt* of theſe five particulars, *viz.* a *lively ſenſe* and *unfeigned acknowledgment* to God of our many *imperfections* and *ſins* is ταπεινοφροσυνη, *lowlineſs* of mind. We are to be *vile in our own eyes*, becauſe we have indeed made ourſelves vile by ſin, and we are to lie low in the duſt before God.

LET me add, that *humility*, beſides this ſenſe and conviction of our imperfections and ſins *abſolutely* conſidered, ſeems to imply farther a ſenſe and acknowledgment of them in a *comparative* view; *i. e.* the *humble* man thinks and owns what he is *before God*, the ſelf-exiſtent, moſt holy, and all-perfect Being. In this light he can as it were behold nothing elſe but God; or, if he ſees himſelf, it is only ſo as to wonder at the littleneſs of his knowledge and virtue, and of every faculty and attainment, and the greatneſs of his folly and ſin that he ſhould offend againſt this glorious God, abuſe his favours, and affect to be any thing, or

to do any thing without him. [d] " *Lord,* " *what is man that thou art mindful of him,* " *or the ſon of man that thou viſiteſt him!* " Man, who in thy ſight is but *vanity,* " whatever figure he may make as to his " intellectual part among thy works here " below! Thou art *from everlaſting,* I am " but juſt come into Being. Thy exiſtence " is neceſſary and ſelf-originated, mine is " the mere effect of thy good pleaſure. " *Thou filleſt heaven and earth* with thy pre- " ſence, I poſſeſs but a little portion of " ſpace. *Thou knoweſt all things,* I know " very few,—and not one thing perfectly. " *To thee all things are poſſible,* to me no- " thing without thy concurrence. Thou " art all-ſufficient, my ſufficiency is from " thee. Thou art *glorious in holineſs,* I am " become vile and hateful by ſin. Thou " changeſt not, being *without the leaſt vari-* " *ableneſs or ſhadow of turning,* I am ſubject " to endleſs viciſſitudes in my mind and " body, and outward condition. Thou art " the *bleſſed God,* infinitely happy in the " enjoyment of thyſelf; the ſmiles of thy " countenance and the communications of " thy bounty being withdrawn, I am a poor " wretched creature, as *miſerable* as I am " *ſinful,* beſet with evils of various kinds " which oppreſs and ſend me to the duſt.

" And

[d] Pſal. viii. 4.

" And what ſhall I ſay unto thee, O Lord " God, but that I am as nothing before " thee? that I have the greateſt reaſon to " be humble, and ſhall make my ſin *ex-* " *ceeding ſinful* if I am *proud?*"

LET this ſuffice for the deſcription of the *temper* which conſtitutes *humility*; it may render the diſcourſe more generally uſeful if I add a brief account of the principal *ways* in which this humble temper *expreſſes* itſelf; but this, with the bleſſedneſs of the poor in ſpirit, I ſhall leave for the next opportunity.

SERMON XI.

The Bleſſedneſs of the poor in ſpirit.

MATTH. v. 3.

Bleſſed are the poor in ſpirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

IN treating theſe words I propos'd,

I. To *explain* the character of the *poor in ſpirit*; and

II. To repreſent their *bleſſedneſs*; *theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

I. IN explaining the character, I obſerved that it ſignified either thoſe who have a *temper* of mind ſuited to a ſtate of *poverty*; or (which I apprehend our Saviour's princi-

pal

pal meaning) *humility*. By humility is meant a *deep conviction* and *suitable acknowledgment* before God of our *imperfections*, *sins* and *follies*, of our great unworthiness of the favour of God, and our liableness to his displeasure and condemnation. I gave you a distinct description of this temper under *five* particulars. The *humble* man does not *attribute* to *himself* any *excellence* or *good* which *he has not*——he *over-rates not* any good which he *possesses* or *does*——he takes not an *inordinate* delight in *himself*—— he assumes not to *himself more* of the *praise* of any thing *laudable* than *belongs* to him—and he has a *lively sense* of his many *imperfections* and *sins*, and unfeignedly *acknowledges* them before God; and this conviction of his own meanness and sinfulness, is greatly increas'd by a *comparative view* of God the self-existent, most holy, and all-perfect Being.——As it may render the discourse more instructive, I propose now to add a view of the *principal ways* in which this temper *expresses* itself, and they are the following.

1. HUMILITY discovers itself in the *modesty* of a man's *outward appearance*. In his habit, in his house, and in the whole figure he makes; the humble man considers his age, his abilities, his character, his function; and

and will avoid whatever either of theſe would make indecent. He will preſerve that moderation on theſe ſeveral articles that no one may have reaſon to ſuſpect he values himſelf upon theſe foreign ornaments, or expects to be valued for them.

2. THE humble man is *modeſt* in his *deſires* and *purſuits*, He is not vain-glorious, aims not at things beyond his ſtrength, or above his pretenſions. [a] *Lord, my heart is not haugty, nor mine eyes lofty, neither do I exerciſe myſelf in great matters, or in things too high for me.* He prefers a *good* name before a *great*; and unleſs where Providence calls him forth, he ſeeks obſcurity rather than to be publickly known. He is not eager and immoderate in his deſires of honour, which, whoever is, will be apt to go out of his way for it, when the plain road does not lead to it, and ſuit his behaviour to the notions which they have of honour from whom he courts it; and will be impatient of repulſes and diſappointments; and, as often as he miſſes of his aim, conſume and eat himſelf out with vexation. He who is not content with the approbation of his *own conſcience*, and an *all-knowing* God, diſcovers it to be his chief ambition to *pleaſe men.*

3. HUMILITY ſhows itſelf in our *converſations* with, and *behaviour* towards *other men*;

[a] Pſal. cxxxi. 1.

men; teaching us not to be obſtinate in defending our opinions, nor forward to impoſe them; not to be ſo abject as to flatter others, nor ſo vain as to love they ſhould flatter us. *Humility* is never unattended with affability and ſweetneſs of behaviour, equally diſtant from haughtineſs and mean ſervile compliances. The humble man knows how to behave in *every relation*, and never diſturbs the peace and good order of ſociety; is careful to [b] *render to all their due, honour to whom honour*, maintains a proper reſpect and ſubmiſſion to his ſuperiors, an equal friendly manner with his equals, and, without any difficulty, is able to *condeſcend to men of low eſtate*. He is the ſame to his inferiors which he would have his ſuperiors be to him. The humble man had rather own a fault, than make it greater by going about to juſtify it; is not aſham'd of being obliged to others, or to acknowledge the obligation; wherein *humility* differs from that *falſe* virtue which *Ariſtotle* aſcribes to the *magnanimous* perſon, "who, he ſaith, is pleas'd when he can "confer a benefit, and bluſhes to receive "one." He is not uneaſy to hear others commended, does not endeavour to engroſs reputation to himſelf, but gladly admits others into a ſhare of it, and is ready to promote their good name as far as he can do it conſiſtently with truth.

4. IN

[b] Rom. xiii. 7.—xii. 16.

4. IN *proſperity* the humble man is not *lifted up*. He does not *forget himſelf* under the ſmiles of Providence, or *inſult others*. His mind is not ſubject to the changes of his outward condition. If God proſpers his deſigns, and pours his bounties upon him, he does not imagine himſelf the better man for this, nor think that he is authorized to boaſt of the favour which is ſhown him.

5. IN a ſtate of *affliction* humility preſerves us from all *murmuring* and *impatience*. The *humble* man never thinks that God does him wrong, or deals too hardly with him. He accepts the puniſhment of his ſins, and ſaith [b] *unto God as it is meet, I have borne chaſtiſement, I will not offend any more.* Few things differ more widely than the behaviour of the *proud* and the *humble* man in *adverſity*. The *proud* man can ſcarcely forbear openly repining againſt God, when he afflicts him in his body, or outward circumſtances; his own [c] *fooliſhneſs perverts his way, and then his heart fretteth againſt the Lord.* He falls out with God and man; while the *humble* perſon gives glory to God by acknowledging the equity of all his proceedings, and makes the yoke much the more ſupportable by not behaving impatiently under it.—By theſe, and ſuch like *marks*, is *humility* known. And thus have I conſider'd the *character*

[b] Job xxxiv. 31. [c] Prov. xix. 3.

character of the true diſciples of Chriſt, they are *poor in ſpirit.*

II. LET us now briefly conſider their *bleſſedneſs. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* This paſſage is known to have *two eminent* acceptations in ſcripture, being either put for the *kingdom* of *grace*, or the *kingdom* of *glory*; and in both theſe ſenſes it is true concerning the *poor in ſpirit*, that they are *bleſſed, becauſe theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

1. *THEIRS is the kingdom of heaven*, as that phraſe ſignifies the kingdom of *grace*, or the *goſpel-ſtate and diſpenſation.* The *poor in ſpirit*, thoſe of a *contented* and *humble* mind, were the *beſt prepared* to receive the *goſpel of the kingdom*; *all* the true ſubjects of this *kingdom* are of this *character*; and there is a particular *ſuitableneſs* between *ſuch* a temper of mind and the goſpel-ſtate and conſtitution.

1. THE *poor in ſpirit*, or thoſe of a *humble and contented* mind were the *beſt prepared* to receive the *goſpel of the kingdom.* When the kingdom of the *Meſſiah* was firſt publiſh'd all were invited into it, but few, in compariſon, were *diſpoſed* to become members of it. This is the meaning of that expreſſion,

preſſion, [d] *many are called but few are choſen.* The goſpel was preach'd to all without diſtinction, high and low, rich and poor; but all were not in a like *preparation of mind* to embrace it. They who doated upon the power and riches of this world, they who had no notion of any happineſs but what was of a worldly kind, or of any wants they had but what related to the body; they who fancied they had knowledge, and underſtanding, and goodneſs more than ſufficient, but thought they could never have enough of external enjoyments; ſuch as theſe were not qualified to receive the doctrine of the goſpel. When they heard this *new* teacher ſaying, [e] *He that will be my diſciple, let him take up his croſs and follow me; whoſoever he be that forſaketh not all that he has he cannot be my diſciple*; muſt not the propoſals he made be very unacceptable to them? They would be ready thus to reaſon with themſelves, "to renounce the world is to renounce "our happineſs; and what can make us "any valuable compenſation for that? To "ſubmit to a life of poverty and affliction, "to be hated and deſpiſed of all men for "the ſake of our new Lord and Maſter, "who can bear the thought of it?" This was the reaſon that [f] *not many wiſe men after the*

[d] Matt. xxii. 14. [e] Matt. xvi. 24. [f] 1 Cor. i. 26—29.

the fleſh, not many mighty, not many noble were called, (ſo as to *obey* the call) but *God* was pleaſed to *chuſe the fooliſh things of the world to confound the wiſe, and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty; and baſe things of the world, and things deſpiſed did God chuſe, yea and things that were not* (in compariſon) *to bring to nought things that were; that no fleſh ſhould glory in his ſight.* Not that any, be their quality and condition in the world what it would, were ſhut out from the privileges of the goſpel; but as it is too often ſeen, the *outward* condition *corrupted* the *temper* of the mind. It was not all their wealth, and power, and greatneſs, that would have hindred them from coming to Chriſt, or being accepted by him, if they had not been *proud*, and *covetous*, and *ambitious*; and where theſe vices reigned it was no wonder the doctrine of a *humble crucified* Saviour could not find admiſſion. It was otherwiſe in reſpect of thoſe who had a meanner opinion of themſelves and of the world. Such as theſe were like the [g] *merchant* in the *parable ſeeking goodly pearls; who when he had found one pearl of great price, went and ſold all that he had and bought it.* So did they judge it a wiſe bargain to part with all that they might *win Chriſt*, and be made partakers of *his unſearchable riches.*

[g] Matt. xiii. 45.

riches. [h] *To them Chriſt crucified* was not ſuch a *ſtumbling-block* as he was to the generality of the world, but the *power of God and the wiſdom of God.* They were not ſo wiſe in their own account, but that they were willing to grow wiſer by the inſtructions and pattern of this divine Teacher; and joined [i] *in caſting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalted itſelf againſt the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Chriſt.* Theſe were the perſons to whom the goſpel was abundantly welcome, who eſteemed it a [k] *ſaying worthy of all acceptation, that Jeſus Chriſt came into the world to ſave ſinners*; being ſenſible of their own guilt and corruption from which they were glad to be delivered at any price, tho' it was with the loſs of all worldly good things, which they did not value equal to the privilege of freedom from ſin, which the goſpel held forth to them.

2. The *goſpel* Church or Kingdom is *made up* of perſons of this *character*; at leaſt none but ſuch are true ſubjects of this Kingdom. Every one who is *poor in ſpirit* is a *chriſtian indeed*; and every one who is a chriſtian or diſciple of Chriſt indeed is *poor in ſpirit.* Theſe terms are *convertible.* The *kingdom* of *Chriſt* is not like the *kingdom of this world.*

[h] 1 Cor. i. 23— [i] 2 Cor. x. 15. [k] 1 Tim. i. 15.

world. In the kingdoms of men the ambitious and aſpiring are incouraged, the rich, the mighty, the honourable, carry all before them. A man is valued not ſo much by what he *is himſelf*, as by what he *has*. Men of a lowly ſpirit are often trampled upon, and humility is reckon'd meanneſs of ſoul. But the ſtandard of true worth is quite different from this in the *kingdom* of the *Meſſiah*; here *poverty* of *ſpirit* is the ſureſt title to honour, no good ſubject is a ſtranger to this quality, and the chief favourites are moſt eminently diſtinguiſh'd by it. Therefore, in anſwer to the diſciples, [l] *who aſked him, who was greateſt in the kingdom of heaven? Jeſus called a little child and ſet him in the midſt of them, and ſaid, whoſoever ſhall humble himſelf as this little child, the ſame is greateſt in the kingdom of heaven.* And again, [m] *Suffer little children and forbid them not to come unto me for of ſuch is the kingdom of heaven.* My diſciples are of a humble, unprejudic'd, teachable ſpirit, like that of children; they do not think themſelves above being taught, nor find fault with the ſimplicity of the goſpel. And when a ſpirit of ambition began to ſhow itſelf among the diſciples of our Lord, [n] *he called them to him and ſaid, Ye know that the princes*

[l] Matt. xviii. 1.— [m] Matt. xix. 13, 14.. [n] Matt. xx. 25.—

of the Gentiles exerciſe dominion over them, and they that are great exerciſe authority upon them; but it ſhall not be ſo among you: but whoever will be great among you let him be your miniſter; and whoever will be chief among you let him be your ſervant. So intent was he upon convincing them that humility was one of the beſt marks by which men might be known for his diſciples, and one of the ſtrongeſt recommendations to his favour.

3. There is a *particular ſuitableneſs* between the *temper* of mind before deſcrib'd and the *goſpel-ſtate* and *conſtitution.* The goſpel is full of *precepts*, requiring humility and contempt of the world, and it wants not *examples* fitted to inforce its divine precepts, above all, the example of the *Son of God*; who therefore requires all to [o] *learn of him, who was meek and lowly in heart, that they may find reſt to their ſouls.* The chriſtian religion is the beſt fitted in the world to inſpire humility; it ſhews us ourſelves in the trueſt light, as *weak*, *corrupted*, and *guilty*; ſo weak, that we cannot, with ſucceſs, [p] *work out our ſalvation*, but when *God works in us to will and to do*; ſo guilty, that the [q] *blood of the Son of God* muſt be ſhed to *expiate* our ſins, and the greater part

[o] Matt. xi. 29. [p] Phil. ii. 12, 13. [q] 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

part so corrupted by evil practice, that they [r] *must be born again or they cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* To promote the same temper, our religion shews *God* to us in *all his glory*, as at once [f] *infinitely holy* and *infinitely good*; hereby designing to humble us under our pollution, which must render us unfit to approach so holy a majesty; and under a sense of our ingratitude, which is heightned beyond all measure by the consideration of that goodness and mercy against which we have offended. Our religion farther shews us *the Son of God* casting a veil upon his glory, and condescending to come down in the *form of a servant*, and *in the likeness of sinful flesh*; that so he might direct and warm us by his *example*, as well as make *atonement* for us by his *death*; that [t] *the same mind might be in us, which was also in Christ Jesus. Who being in the form of God, did not covet to appear as a God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.* Here was an instance of *humiliation* indeed! *humility* is the lesson we learn from the incarnation of Christ, the circumstances of his birth and

[r] John iii. 3. [f] 1 Pet. i. 16, 17. 1 John i. 5. iv. 16. Matt. xix. 17. [t] Phil. ii. 5—Rom. viii. 13.

education, the manner in which he converſed and acted, and the death he ſuffered. And when we conſider that [u] *through him alone, as our mediator and advocate, we have acceſs to God*, how ſtrongly does it teach us to be humble; ſince we have no hope that our prayers, our duties, our virtues, our perſons will be accepted, ſo as to be rewarded with eternal life, but through the merits and obedience of another? So admirably adapted is the *religion* of Chriſt to promote the growth of *humility*; and ſo wonderfully ſuited is the temper and character of the *humble* man to this religion. Not only the *laws* of this kingdom enjoin *poverty of ſpirit*, but we ſee it *exemplified* in him who is made *lord* and *head* of it, who was of a contented as well as of a humble mind, and [w] *though rich made himſelf poor for our ſakes.* He had the command of all the wealth of the world, but ſhow'd his contempt of it in leaving it to be enjoy'd by men of no worth or goodneſs; while he himſelf was ſo poor as [x] *not to have where to lay his head*; ſo poor as to ſubſiſt, very probably, upon his *own labours* before he enter'd upon his publick miniſtry, and afterwards on the generoſity of his friends; and who took

[u] Epheſ. i. 6. ii. 18. 1 Tim. ii. 5. Rom. v. 19. vi. 23. [w] 2 Cor. viii. 9. [x] Matt. viii. 2.

took as little care to make his friends and favourites rich as he did himſelf.

ALL this ſhows that the *kingdom* of *grace* belongs to *the poor in ſpirit*. And if it be aſk'd how this ſhows them to be *bleſſed?* the anſwer is eaſy. They have great peace and pleaſure *immediately* ariſing out of that temper of ſoul, which qualify them to become ſubjects of the *heavenly kingdom*. They have a compoſure of mind, an undiſturbed reſt and eſtabliſhment under all the changes of the preſent life, and the many croſs occurrences of it, to which the proud, the ambitious, the covetous are intirely ſtrangers. Their Prayers are acceptable with God, [y] *who forgetteth not the cry of the humble*; they are intitled to the preſence of the [z] *high and holy one who inhabiteth eternity, who dwelleth in the high and holy place; with him alſo who is of a contrite and humble ſpirit, to revive the ſpirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. Finally*, they may expect more liberal communications of *divine grace*; the conſideration with which the apoſtle *Peter* ſets home his advice upon chriſtian profeſſors. [a] *Be clothed with humility; for God reſiſteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. To this man will he look, even to him who is poor and of a contrite ſpirit, and trembleth at his word.* The *per-*

[y] Pſal. ix. 12. [z] Iſai. lvii. 15. [a] 1 Pet. v. 5.

ſon ſet over this kingdom to manage all the affairs of it, and to diſpenſe the rewards belonging to it, is the *Lord Jeſus*; and he cannot but have a favour for thoſe perſons, and delight in them above all others, who are poſſeſt of that *grace*, eſpecially who excel in it, of which he himſelf was ſo bright an example. And certainly 'tis no little honour to bear ſo near a reſemblance to our *king*, and to have ſo large a ſhare in his favour. To ſouls ſo like his *own* our bleſſed Lord will not fail to manifeſt himſelf; his Spirit ſhall ſupport and refreſh theirs, and fill them with unſpeakable conſolation. And what more needs be ſaid to ſhow the *bleſſedneſs of the poor in ſpirit*, even *in* this world, where their glory is moſt eclipſed, and they ſuffer under many hardſhips and inconveniencies. Whatever meaſure of affliction is allotted them by God, or how ungrateful ſoever the uſage they meet with from the hands of men, ſtill they are bleſſed in this, that *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*, that they are governed by the beſt laws, ſharers in the nobleſt privileges, and approved as faithful ſubjects by the beſt of *Kings*. What an honour, what an happineſs is this!

2. *BLESSED are the poor in ſpirit*, becauſe *theirs is the kingdom of glory*, or that ſtate of *eternal reward* which follows after this

this life. They are heirs of that bleſſed world; [b] *heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jeſus Chriſt*; and they ſhall as certainly in due time poſſeſs it, as their forerunner Jeſus Chriſt is already enter'd upon it. They who have the *ſpirit* of *poverty*, ſo as not to have their hearts ſet upon the things of this world, ſhall be made rich indeed. Have they had little or nothing of this world's goods, and were they contented with what they had, tho' little? this contentment of theirs ſhall be rewarded with everlaſting fulneſs and abundance. [c] *The poor*, in this ſenſe, being *rich in faith*, *God has choſen* to be *heirs of his kingdom*. There ſhall be a happy and glorious reverſe of their condition. It was with ſome difficulty that they overcame the temptations of thoſe ſtrait and low circumſtances in which the Providence of God ſaw fit to place them; but by the grace of God they did overcome, and ſee now how *great* is their *reward in heaven*. They are now ſet above the reach of theſe, and all other temptations; and perhaps, the *years of famine* being *ended*, they have the quicker reliſh, and the fuller enjoyment of thoſe *years*, or rather, *everlaſting ages* of *plenty* which ſucceed them. [d] *In this life they had their evil things*; now is the time for them to receive their *good things*, they

[b] Rom. viii. 17. [c] James ii. 5. [d] Luke xvi. 25.

are comforted for the few days in which they ſaw affliction and diſtreſs.

NOR is *this bleſſedneſs* confined to thoſe whoſe *outward condition* is poor; but alike belongs to all who are *poor in ſpirit*, whatever be their circumſtances in the world. [e] Do they know how *to uſe the world*, if they have it, for the glory of God, and the benefit of their fellow-creatures; *not abuſing it* by obeying the dictates of luſt and covetouſneſs? Let them be never ſo rich, would they think themſelves *poor*, if they had nothing *better* to hope for, no intereſt in the favour of God, no title to a future happineſs? Do they prize thoſe things which are common to them with the pooreſt ſaints, infinitely beyond thoſe by which they are outwardly diſtinguiſhed from them? Such as theſe are not the perſons ſpoken to by our Saviour, when he ſaith, [f] *Wo unto you rich, for ye have received your conſolation.* This cannot be ſaid of the rich whom I am now deſcribing; they have *not received their conſolation*; their chief conſolation is not in preſent things; on the contrary, they would be inconſolable if this were their all. They can truly ſay, "Rather let me be as de-"ſtitute and wretched as the *poor man* in "the *parable*, if, like him, I may be car-"ried after death into *Abraham*'s boſom; "than

[e] 1 Cor. vii. 31. [f] Luke vi. 24.

" than have my good things as the *rich* " *man* had, and in the end meet *his* dread- " ful doom. If I reſemble him in reſpect " of riches, 'tis thy Providence, O Lord, " that makes this reſemblance, which I " truſt therefore is not my crime; but " thanks be to to thy *grace* I am not like " him in his *moral* and *religious* character! " I deteſt his way of life, his luxury, and " pride, and intemperance, his want of " gratitude to God, and compaſſion to the " poor." Bleſſed are all they who are of this chriſtian ſpirit. Such as theſe have laid up for themſelves *treaſures in heaven*; and therefore riches and honour are laid up for them, *even durable riches and righteouſneſs*; riches, as much more ſatisfying, as they are more durable than the riches of the world, which they know how to deſpiſe while they poſſeſs them.

BLESSED alſo are the *humble* in mind, *becauſe theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* [s] *Whoſoever exalteth himſelf ſhall be abaſed, and he that humbleth himſelf ſhall be exalted.* So different an *end* have *pride* and *humility*, if we believe the Saviour of the world, who is to diſtribute the rewards of the laſt day. Then will he ſay to the humble ſouls, " Come " up hither, take your place at my right " hand; you are the perſons whom I de- " light

[s] Matt. xxiii. 12.

" light to honour. Foraſmuch as you did " not your alms and other good actions to " be *ſeen of men*, I will now reward you " in the preſence of my angels, and of this " great aſſembly." Well might the Wiſeman ſay, [h] *That before honour is humility.* Humility ſeeks not honour of men, it ſhall therefore be the more highly honoured by God. And if all this be true, as we have the word of God to aſſure us it is, if perſons of a *humble* and *contented mind* are to paſs into this glorious and happy ſtate when they depart out of this life; then ſurely the *poor in ſpirit* muſt of all men be pronounced the *moſt bleſſed.* They will receive a *kingdom that cannot be moved*; they ſhall ſhare in the glories of that kingdom which infinitely exceed all the glories which the kingdoms of this world, the moſt ſplendid and powerful of them, can boaſt. *Heaven* and *Happineſs* are words of the ſame meaning. When we would ſum up the higheſt happineſs of which human nature is capable in one word, we call it *Heaven*; and by calling it the *Kingdom of Heaven*, if we do not *raiſe* the idea, we ſet it in a fuller light. For in *this* kingdom who is the *King*, but *he* who is the *moſt high Poſſeſſor* of *heaven* and *earth*, and almighty *Maker* of both? This kingdom is now under the adminiſtration of the

[h] Prov. xv. 33.

the *Meſſiah*, the Son of God, who will at laſt [i] *deliver it up to the Father, that God may be all in all.* He will be *in all* the inhabitants of that heavenly world, and he will be *all to them*; the life of their lives, the ſpring of all their pleaſures, and a ſpring that is continually flowing, and never fails. They have acceſs to the immediate *preſence* of God and the *Lamb*, they behold the face of God ſeated on the throne of heaven with a *viſible Majeſty* becoming the Lord of the univerſe, and they have the honour to be always approved ſervants to the *King of Kings.* Perfect brightneſs, vigour, beauty, and immortality adorn their bodies; perfect knowledge, and goodneſs, their minds. They are employ'd in the nobleſt deſigns of the divine government, and ever diſcharge their truſts in a manner perfectly pleaſing to their great King. For *this kingdom*, and for this happineſs, the *poor in ſpirit* are in the very temper of their minds *fitted. Theirs* is the *temper* of heaven, which would not be *heaven* to them if their temper was *different.* The earthly minded and the proud are not qualified to partake of the happineſs of that world. Like the *Iſraelites*, who preferred the *garlick* and the *onions* of *Egypt* to the *milk* and *honey* of *Canaan*, men of a worldly ſpirit would by no means think it an advantageous change to

[i] 1 Cor. xv. 24—28.

to be tranſplanted from earth to heaven; earth would have their *hearts* if heaven had their *company:* and as for the *proud*, what have they to do among thoſe lowly ſpirits? [k] *who fall down before him that ſitteth upon the throne, and worſhip him that liveth for ever and ever, and caſt their crowns before the throne, ſaying,* "*Thou art worthy, O* "*Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and* "*power, for thou haſt created all things, and* "*for thy pleaſure they are and were created.* "*Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and* "*the glory*; the *glory* of all is *thine*, and "to thee we aſcribe it. *Not unto us, not* "*unto us, O Lord, but unto thy name*, does "the *praiſe* belong. Whatever we are, we "are by thy free bounty and goodneſs, thy "*grace* gave us the victory, and the ſame "grace *rewards* our victory with everlaſt-"ing reſt and triumph." The ſpirits of heaven are as humble as they are glorious; they are at once clothed with *glory* and *humility*, and they eſteem their humility no little part of their glory.

LET us now apply this ſubject.

1. WHAT an excellent teacher is Jeſus Chriſt, and how excellent that religion which is taught by him! The *morality* of the antient *Philoſophers* is very defective. The nobleſt, in ſome reſpects, is that of the *Stoicks*; but

[k] Revel. iv. 10, 11.

but in *this particular* it fails moſt miſerably, even more than that of other ſects. Inſtead of inculcating *humility*, it too much cheriſhes the *pride* of the human heart. To judge only by the writings of the *Stoicks*, and much more by the boaſts which they make of the *ſelf-ſufficiency* of their *wiſe man*, (that is of *themſelves*) one would not think that *pride* was a very great fault: and yet certainly it is, and being likewiſe an epidemical diſeaſe, there was the more need that they who pretended to reform and perfect human nature by their precepts, ſhould have ſet themſelves againſt it. This defect is happily ſupplied by our divine Maſter. *He knew what was in man*, the diſtempers of ſoul he laboured under, and the virtues which would render him moſt dear and lovely in the ſight of God; and therefore commands his diſciples to be *poor in ſpirit*, incouraging them to be ſo by his own *example*, which was the beſt *comment* upon his *doctrine*. When he requires *humility*, he requires no more of his followers than he practiſed himſelf in the moſt difficult degree, for [l] *he came not to be miniſtred unto, but to miniſter*; of which he gave a moſt ſurprizing inſtance, when [m] *he waſhed his diſciples feet*, telling them, that *he had given them an example, that they ſhould do as he had done unto them*; *i. e.* con-

[l] Matt. xx. 28. [m] John xiii. 14, 15.

i. e. condeſcend to any offices of love to which they were called by the Providence of God, how much ſoever they might ſeem to leſſen themſelves hereby. Thoſe very things, which ſome perſons of bad tempers and lives have made *objections* againſt Chriſtianity, are really very great *arguments* of its *truth* and *divinity*; ſuch as, among others, the contempt of human grandeur, forgiveneſs of injuries, and humbleneſs of mind; which, in the ſight of God, and in the judgment of ſound reaſon, is of great price, how much ſoever it may be undervalued by thoſe whoſe prejudices make them incompetent judges of it.

2. Let all then who *name the name of Chriſt*, be perſuaded to *learn* of *him* this firſt and difficult leſſon of chriſtianity. It has the honour to be the *firſt* of the Beatitudes. *Bleſſed are the poor in ſpirit*, thus the *eternal Wiſdom* begins; and indeed the foundation had need be laid low, where the building is to be rais'd ſo high. *Humility* prepares the way for the practice of other virtues; there is no forming any notion of *repentance* without it. *Sin*, in its very eſſence, is *pride* and *preſumption*; oppoſing a man's own fancy, and paſſions, and inclinations, to the wiſdom and authority of God; *repentance* conſequently muſt include *humility*. A *proud penitent* is a contradiction in terms, when we ſpeak

ſpeak of repentance towards God. In confeſſing a fault to men, there may be a ſhow of humility, when there is a great deal of pride in the heart; which would hinder a man from making ſuch a ſubmiſſion, were he not under a neceſſity of doing it, or had not ſome worldly ends to ſerve by it: but then ſuch a repentance as this is only outward; whereas the only repentance which a heart-ſearching God will accept, is that of the heart. Here therefore the humility of the true penitent reſides. And as the penitent begins with *humility*, confeſſing and bewailing his ſins before God; ſo humility aſſiſts him in going on to perfection. He who thinks *he has already attained*, is not likely to ſtrive much for that which he fancies he has already. He who fancies himſelf to be rich when he is poor, is never like to be otherwiſe than poor. This is the condition of the *proud* man, who, for this reaſon, cannot be expected to make any tolerable progreſs in virtue and religion. To which we may add this other reaſon, that he is not ſo ſenſible as he ought to be of his wanting the *continual* aids of *God's grace*; and not being ſenſible that he wants help, he will neglect to implore it. *Prayer* is the very *life* of the *chriſtian*; a man may as well live without breathing, as the chriſtian without prayer. But will that man pray, will he

he pray always, will he pray with earneſtneſs and devotion, who conceits that he is *ſufficient* of *himſelf* for every part of his duty; or that if God does any thing, it is very little in compariſon? It can hardly be imagined that ſuch a man will ſtrive with God in prayer, and intreat, as for his life, that God would not deny him the *aſſiſtance* of *his Spirit*, in order to his complete victory over the world, the fleſh, and the devil, the acceptable diſcharge of his duty, and his happy proficiency in every virtue. Under the *divine aſſiſtance*, what temptation is there which the chriſtian may not hope to overcome; what virtue, in which he may not hope to excel? and what meaſures of divine aſſiſtance may not he hope to attain, who is *inſtant* and *perſevering* in *prayer* for them? This every truly *humble* man is; and the more humble, the more fervent. In learning this leſſon of humility we are farther to remember, that it is one of the moſt *difficult*; which I mention not with a deſign to diſcourage any, but to excite them to greater care and diligence. *Pride* is a vice to which we are all of us too prone, under one ſhape or other; it ſteals upon us unperceiv'd, and has a greater ſhare and influence (I had almoſt ſaid) in *every* thing we do, but to be ſure, in *many* of our actions, than we can eaſily imagine. We naturally love ourſelves,

ourſelves, and this makes us willing to think well of ourſelves; and when we are thus diſpoſed, we lay hold of every thing which favours this inclination; whatever does in the leaſt ſeem to juſtify this good opinion of ourſelves, we carefully lay up, and extravagantly magnify, while we are wilfully blind to our faults and imperfections: this renders it difficult to know the pride of our hearts, and much more to conquer it; but the more difficult the conqueſt, the more glorious. By every inch of ground we gain upon this enemy, we ſhall reap ſome advantage, and find the difficulty of after-conqueſts much leſſened. Let us therefore grudge no pains that we may be able to ſubdue the riſings of pride, and learn humility and contentment. I add *contentment*, becauſe, as I ſhow'd before, it ſeems to be part of the meaning of the text; and indeed, by learning to be humble, we learn at the ſame time, and by the ſame means, to be contented; the humble man being always the moſt content. There is a manifeſt and inſeparable connection between thoſe two virtues; it is no wonder if the proud man be diſcontented, but it would be exceeding wonderful if the humble perſon was ſo; it being a thing never known, that the ſame perſon deſerved the character of a humble, and a diſcontented covetous ſpirit. The hum-

ble man may not be free from all the remains of a worldly temper, and the reaſon is, that he is not altogether free from pride; but in the ſame degree as he hath the ſpirit of humility, he has the ſpirit of poverty too; and cannot excel in one, without making an anſwerable proficiency in the other. The humble man knows [n] *how to be abaſed as well as how to abound, every where and in all things he is inſtructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to ſuffer need.* In ſhort, *he can do all things through Chriſt who ſtrengthens him.* Let us then be unwearied in our endeavours after theſe excellent attainments; let us not only endeavour to *ſeem*, but to *be* humble; not only to *ſeem* indifferent to the wealth and grandeur of the world, but to be *really* ſo. In order to this, I would leave with you the following Directions.

1. Let us converſe more with *ourſelves.* A narrow ſcrutiny into our own characters and conduct, into our hearts and lives, and frequent obſervations of the faults and follies of which we are guilty, would have a very good effect. He whoſe thoughts dwell moſt at home, is moſt likely to know himſelf; and the better any man knows himſelf, the more humble he will be. We ſhould often aſk ourſelves, how have I behav'd in the ſeveral

[n] Philip. iv. 12, 13.

several relations of life? what improvement have I made of my many advantages? what manner of person might I have been if I had been watchful to lay hold of the opportunities that were offered, and had made the best of my time, and all my abilities? what manner of person am I now? can't I think of any errors and follies which I have fallen into? if I am free from *anger*, am I not inclined to *sensuality*? if I am clear from *intemperance*, am I also from *covetousness*? if *just* to men, am I *habitually devout* towards God? am I as *charitable* and *beneficent*, as when in necessity myself I should think it reasonable others should be to me? have I always acted like a *wise* and a *good* man; always regarded my obligations as a *christian*, and taken care to fulfil them? Let us narrowly examine our actions, as to the principles and ends of them; the consequence of this self-examination impartially pursued, and frequently repeated, will be, that whatever our character be, or our behaviour has been, we shall see cause enough to be humble, even when we have the greatest ground for rejoicing; since the most perfect will find they have great defects, and that their improvements have not been proportionable to their advantages.

2. LET us imagine the world was as well acquainted with our *infide* as they are with

our *outſide*; that whatever we know by *ourſelves*, was likewiſe known to *others*; the fooliſh and ſinful workings of our minds; the vain thoughts which paſs within us; the paſſions which mutiny in our breaſts; and the vexation we ſuffer upon very trifling occaſions; what a ſmall matter lifts us up or caſts us down; how little command we have over ourſelves; the imperfection of our beſt actions; and how far they ſometimes are from being ſo good as they appear; ſhould we, in caſe the world had ſuch a view of us as this, be ſo apt to be puff'd up as we are now? if not, 'tis plain we ground our pride upon other mens ignorance of us. But if *men* do not know us thoroughly, *God* does, even more thoroughly then we know ourſelves; thoſe ſins and errors which eſcape our own notice, are not conceal'd from him; and as the knowledge of ourſelves, ſo the ſerious conſideration of this knowledge which God has of us, is one excellent means of promoting our humility.

3. LET us not conſider merely what we ourſelves are at preſent, in *compariſon* of ſome *others*; but conſider what we are in *proportion* to the *advantages* we have enjoy'd, and what we might have been had we duly improv'd them. Perhaps ſome, in compariſon of whom we value ourſelves, have made greater improvements in proportion to their advan-

advantages than we have done. Though we have *five talents* we may be as unprofitable servants as he who hath but *one*; if we had five given us at first, and he but one.

4. LET us propose to ourselves the *best patterns* for our imitation. The example of the *Son of God* we should have continually before us, both for the dignity of it, and because it is the example of one whom we call our Lord and Master. It is the honour of the disciple to be as his Lord. And when we consider his uniform fervent piety, his chearful resignation amidst the most afflicted circumstances, his active goodness, notwithstanding the worst returns; his invincible patience under the greatest injuries; his condescension to men, and intire subjection to God, with the like virtues, and compare our own temper and life with his, we shall soon be humbled at the apprehension of our great deficiencies.—The *Angels of light* too, let us consider them. They excel the sons of men by many degrees; they have more knowledge, and more love, and more strength, and never sin or die; yet are they [a] *ministring spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.* As much lower as we are than the angels, these kind and beneficent spirits do not think it beneath them to be our keepers, and to attend

[a] Hebr. i. 14.

tend our ſteps. [p] *The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.*—Our Saviour gives this honourable character of *John the Baptiſt*, that [q] *among them who are born of women there had not ariſen a greater than he*; and how remarkable was this great and good man for his humility, and his poor and abſtemious way of living? *He was clothed with camels hair, and with a girdle of ſkin about his loins, and he did eat locuſts and wild honey.* And his ſpirit was as lowly as his appearance was mean; for when the *Jews* ſent to him to know who he was, [r] *he confeſſed and denied not, but confeſſed that he was not the Chriſt.* He would not give the leaſt countenance to ſuch a thought, tho' ſo much to his own honour. *He that cometh after me*, ſaith he, *is preferred before me, for he is before me, whoſe ſhoes latchet I am not worthy to looſe.* He eſteemed it an honour above his higheſt pretenſions to perform the meaneſt office about the *Meſſiah*. *He muſt increaſe, but I muſt decreaſe*; with the thought of which he was well pleaſed, though he ſhould be like the morning ſtar, which after it has uſher'd in the ſun, is quite hid in his beams. [s] St. *Paul*, who *came not behind the very chief of*

[p] Pſal. xxxiv. 7. [q] Matth. xi. 11. iii. 4.
[r] John i. 20, 27. iii. 30, 31. [s] 1 Cor. xv. 9. Eph. iii. 8.

of the Apoſtles, reflects with ſo much humility upon his paſt conduct when he was a perſecutor, as to ſtile himſelf *the leaſt of the Apoſtles, not meet to be called an Apoſtle, yea leſs than the leaſt of all ſaints.*

5. LET us often compare *pride* and *humility*, the ſpirit of poverty and the ſpirit of the world together. Pride ruffles the breaſt, diſturbs ſociety, and is alike diſpleaſing to God and Man. [t] *When pride cometh then cometh ſhame, but with the lowly is wiſdom. By pride cometh contention and every evil work. Pride goeth before deſtruction, and a haughty ſpirit before a fall.* Whereas humility ſecures the quiet of a man's own boſom, and renders him beloved both of God and Man. What ſucceſs it has in recommending us to the notice and eſteem of men we learn from the *parable*, which [u] *Jeſus put forth to thoſe who dined with him at the houſe of a chief Phariſee, when he marked how they choſe out the chief rooms, ſaying to them, When thou art bidden of another man to a wedding, ſit not down in the higheſt room, leſt a more honourable than thou be bidden; and he who bad both thee and him come and ſay to thee, give this man place, and thou begin with ſhame to take the loweſt room. But when thou art bidden, go and ſit down in the loweſt room; that when he who bad thee com-*

[t] Prov. xi. 2. xiii. 10. xvi. 18. [u] Luke xiv. 7—11.

eth, he may ſay unto thee, Friend, go up higher; then ſhalt thou have worſhip, or honour, *in the preſence of them that ſit at meat with thee. For whoſoever exalteth himſelf ſhall be abaſed, and he that humbleth himſelf ſhall be exalted.* The price it bears in the account of God may be learnt from the [w] *parable* of the *Publican* and the *Phariſee*, of whom the latter *truſted in himſelf as being righteous, and deſpiſed others*; but the former *ſtood afar off, and would not lift up ſo much as his eyes to heaven; but ſmote upon his breaſt, ſaying, God be merciful to me a ſinner!* Upon which our Saviour makes the ſame reflection as upon the former parable; *I tell you, this man went down to his houſe juſtified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himſelf ſhall be abaſed, and he that humbleth himſelf ſhall be exalted.* So that we ſee that *before honour*, both with God and Man, is *humility*. Humility is the ornament of all other virtues, and gives them their greateſt grace and beauty. Humility is to a good converſation, what modeſty is to a beautiful countenance; and though, in ſome ſenſe, it throws a veil over a virtuous life, yet, by this very means, renders it more lovely and inviting, and ſecures our virtue as well as adorns it. The humble man is not *high minded but fears*; by *walking humbly with God*

[w] Luke xviii. 9.—

God he *walketh ſurely*; and ſtands the firmer, becauſe he *takes heed leaſt he fall.* What an honour and happineſs is it alſo to have a ſpirit ſuperior to the world? A ſpirit which has a kind of ſelf-ſufficiency in reſpect of worldly things, can deſpiſe the world when it has moſt of it, and rejoice amidſt the greateſt ſcarcity of worldly comforts. Such a temper is both a credit to the man who is poſſeſs'd of it, and to the religion he profeſſes, while earthly-mindedneſs is a diſhonour to both. Let all this perſuade us to exert our utmoſt endeavours, that we become intitled to this beatitude of our Saviour, *Bleſſed are the poor in ſpirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

SER-

SERMON XII.

The Bleſſedneſs of thoſe that mourn.

MATTH. v. 4.

Bleſſed are they that mourn, for they ſhall be comforted.

THIS is one of thoſe obſervations or rules which our divine Maſter laid down for the attainment of true happineſs. "You, my diſciples, are to *mourn* that you "may be *happy*;" which is ſuch unuſual advice, that the enemies of our bleſſed Saviour think they are from hence ſupplied with an unanſwerable objection againſt his religion; and even ſome of his own followers are too apt to look upon it as a *hard ſaying*, till 'tis explained to them. For does not this contradict the common ſenſe of mankind, who all

all agree to underſtand by happineſs ſuch a ſtate in which a perſon has no reaſon for mourning, but the greateſt reaſon to rejoice and be exceeding glad? So that there never was any one before who plac'd happineſs in mourning. To which I anſwer, neither does Chriſt here do it; he only makes mourning to be the *way* to happineſs, not the *thing itſelf*. He does not ſay, *Bleſſed are they that mourn*, and ſtop there; as if they were bleſſed under that very notion of being mourners; but immediately adds the reaſon of their bleſſedneſs, *for they ſhall be comforted*. Their final bleſſedneſs will conſiſt in that abundant conſolation which will be the reward of their mourning; and their preſent bleſſedneſs, not directly in their mourning itſelf; but in the comfort which they at preſent receive, and the aſſurance they have that in due time *their joy ſhall be full*. This ſingle remark is enough to ſhow, that our Saviour is guilty of no ſuch abſurdity as *putting darkneſs for light, and light for darkneſs*; which, in effect, he would have done, if he had ſuppoſed that mourning and bleſſedneſs, that is ſorrow and joy, were one and the ſame thing. But ſtill it may be aſk'd, why ſhould *mourning* be the *way to happineſs?* is it conſiſtent with the wiſdom and goodneſs of God to make the way ſo unſuitable to the end? is it becauſe

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there is a virtue in mourning; or that we ſhould not have a reliſh for happineſs, if we did not firſt of all know ſorrow? or does *God willingly grieve the children of men*, and delight to ſee them grieve themſelves, tho' no good end be anſwered by it? nothing of this can be truly affirmed. We cannot ſay that there is a *virtue*, or ſomething commendable in *all* mourning; on the contrary, to mourn, where there is no reaſon for it, is *folly*; and where there is reaſon for joy and thankfulneſs, is not only a *folly* but a *fault*. And as for God's making it our duty to mourn, and putting us into ſuch circumſtances that we cannot help doing it, that ſo we may be the better capable of enjoying happineſs after having taſted of the cup of miſery, that cannot be the reaſon neither; ſince the Angels of light were never otherwiſe than happy, as, it is probable, man alſo never would, if he had continued innocent. Much leſs are we made or required to mourn, becauſe God takes a pleaſure in afflicting his creatures, or ſeeing them afflict themſelves. Our *natural* notions of the goodneſs of God, teach us to think better of him; and as for the *Goſpel*, it is ſo far from repreſenting God after this manner, as to give us the moſt amiable and the moſt incouraging account of the nature of God, and of his kind and gracious purpoſes towards the children

children of men. It will therefore be neceſſary to open this ſubject with an *Inquiry* concerning the *mourners* here intended by our Lord, when he ſaith, *Bleſſed are they that mourn.*—We may conſider then theſe words in two views.

I. As intended of ſome *particular* ſorts of perſons. Or,

II. As deſcriptive of *all* the true followers of Jeſus Chriſt. And tho' I am well ſatisfied that the latter is the moſt proper way of conſidering them, yet I ſhall diſcourſe briefly on the former. Let us then,

I. CONSIDER theſe words as intended of ſome *particular* ſorts of perſons. And thus conſidered, they muſt either denote ſuch perſons whoſe circumſtances are *mournful*; or thoſe who by the ſorrows of repentance are endeavouring to recover themſelves out of a ſinful ſtate.

1. THERE are perſons whoſe circumſtances are *mournful*; but ſurely *all* theſe are not therefore bleſſed. They may, by their own wilful and obſtinate follies or ſins, have brought themſelves into circumſtances of diſtreſs; and if ſo, they are hardly objects of pity, and much leſs entitled to a reward. They muſt not put ſuch ſufferings which are ſelf-procured to God's account, but

but their own; and if, being corrected by their own rod, they eſcape any farther puniſhment from God's hand, they ought to be thankful, and think they come off very well, it being much better than they deſerved. Nor is this all, but as the troubles and difficulties men are under may be no more than the natural conſequences of their own ill conduct, ſo when they are in a ſtate of mourning, whether they brought themſelves into it, or were placed in it by the Providence of God, they may not *mourn after a godly ſort*. Their behaviour, inſtead of being ſuch as their circumſtances call for, may be very unſuitable to them. They may have no regard to the hand of God, nor *make ſupplication to their judge*, nor have the leaſt thought how they ſhall improve the affliction they are under. Inſtead of mourning like doves, they may rage and ſtruggle as wild beaſts caught in a net; be fretful and impatient, and *charge God fooliſhly*, when they ſhould humble themſelves before him. Now there is no danger that any ſhould ſuppoſe theſe perſons to be intended.

IT remains, therefore, that if theſe words are to be underſtood particularly of perſons in *mournful circumſtances*, it muſt be of ſuch as *ſuffer for righteouſneſs ſake*, or ſuch as *behave well* in their ſufferings; and there is no doubt that both theſe ſorts of men are *bleſſed:*

ed. Bleſſed are they that are perſecuted for righteouſneſs ſake, ver. 10. Theſe being the ſubjects of a diſtinct beatitude, cannot be intended in the text, the other may; that is, they who though they ſuffer not for *conſcience ſake*, yet, in the common afflictions of life ſuffer *patiently* the will of God, *meekly* reſign themſelves to his diſpoſal, and, in ſhort, remember to practiſe every virtue and every duty, which a day of affliction renders ſeaſonable: theſe being the children of affliction, do, by their manner of bearing and improving affliction, prove themſelves to be likewiſe the *children of God.* And *bleſſed are they who thus mourn, becauſe they ſhall be comforted.* While they are under the chaſtening hand of God, he will not leave them comfortleſs, but give them ſupport anſwerable to their burdens, and the good uſe they make of their own little ſtrength. God will alſo comfort them, by making them to partake of the happy fruits which ſpring from ſanctified afflictions; ſuch as mortification of ſin, an increaſing conformity to the image and to the will of God, a greater indifference to the world, and even to life itſelf, and more vigorous deſires after the heavenly ſtate. And, farther, the time will come when they ſhall be *comforted* in another ſenſe; that is, by

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deliverance out of their troubles; perhaps, in this life, a calm and lightſome ſeaſon ſucceeding the tempeſt in which they have been toſt; or, if not ſo, becauſe God ſees it not fit; yet, to be ſure, after this life is ended, when [a] *all tears ſhall be wiped away from their eyes*, and their faces wear a perpetual ſerenity and chearfulneſs, the natural effect for that gladneſs with which their hearts eternally over-flow.

2. There are other perſons, who by the *ſorrows of repentance*, are endeavouring to recover themſelves out of a ſtate of ſin in which they have hitherto lived. Theſe are very ſincere mourners; they ſit down and mourn over their paſt follies and ſins; or in the fulneſs of their hearts fall proſtrate before the foot-ſtool of divine mercy, confeſſing and bewailing their guilt with the livelieſt conviction of its many aggravations, with the moſt overwhelming ſhame, and the moſt pungent ſorrow. They are ſenſible that their lives have been one continued deviation from the *end* of their beings and the *rule* of their duty; that they have acted the moſt ſenſeleſs and the moſt ungrateful part. Time was when their hearts were hardened, and they could weep for any thing ſooner than for their ſins; when they were

[a] Revel. vii. 17.

were ſuch [b] *fools as to make a mock of ſin*, and a jeſt of damnation; when they equally undervalued the promiſes of the Goſpel, and deſpiſed its threatnings; and the admonitions of Providence, the checks of conſcience, the warnings and invitations of God's word, were no more regarded than the whiſpers of a ſtill voice are heard in the midſt of a roaring tempeſt. But they are no longer thoſe bold and daring ſinners, thoſe ſtupid and relentleſs wretches they once were; their ſouls melt with godly contrition, and their *eyes are fountains of tears*; or if their natural conſtitution be ſuch that they do not ſhed many tears, yet their hearts are ſo heavy laden as to be ready to break; they mourn inwardly, [c] *they are pricked to their hearts*, and unfeignedly and deeply grieved that they ſhould have ſinned againſt God as they have done; for this gives the main accent to their ſorrows, and lies like a heavy weight upon their ſouls, that they have offended againſt ſo great and gracious a God. "[d] *Againſt thee, even againſt thee* "*have I ſinned*; I have trampled upon "thine authority, abuſed thy mercy, griev- "ed thy Spirit, and obſtinately gone on "in my ſinful courſes, notwithſtanding "all the methods thou haſt been pleaſed

[b] Prov. xiv. 9. [c] Acts ii. 37. [d] Pſal. li. 4.

" to employ for reclaiming me. At length, " indeed, I am overcome; but, O how " long did I ſtand out, and with what " difficulty was I brought to yield!" They are now ſenſible of the intrinſic evil and turpitude of ſin, that all its evil does not lie in its being forbidden, or in the puniſhment, which, without repentance, it draws after it; that, on the contrary, ſin is hated and puniſhed by God, becauſe it deſerves to be ſo; and, for that very reaſon, it is hated by the penitent, who ſhows what his notions of ſin are by his ſorrow for it, and his future care to avoid it. They not only mourn for the *guilt* of their ſins, but on account of the *power* which ſin has gotten over them; they mourn after the ſame manner as captives mourn the loſs of their liberty, or the ſick to find themſelves without ſtrength, and ready to die of their diſeaſe. " [e] *I delight in the law of God after the in-* " *ward man.* My reaſon approves that " which is good, and conſcience has ſo " much command in me, that I am re- " ſolved, by the grace of God, to practiſe " it; *but I ſee another law in my members* " *warring againſt the law of my mind, and* " *leading me into captivity to the law of ſin* " *that is in my members. O wretched man* " *that*

[e] Rom. vii. 22,—4.

" *that I am, who ſhall deliver me from the* " *body of this death!*" *Bleſſed are all ſuch mourners, for they ſhall be comforted.* They may hear Chriſt inviting them in thoſe affecting words; [f] *Come unto me all ye who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you reſt.* 'Tis true, theſe words were more immediately ſpoken to penitent ſinners at that time, to whoſe caſe and circumſtances they were more eſpecially adapted. Perſons under conviction of ſin, and ſeeking after peace of conſcience, were then more ignorant of the way of comfort. The ſacrifices of the *law* could not take away ſin, nor the promiſes of it afford intire ſatisfaction to a troubled ſoul. Where is the doctrine of the forgiveneſs of ſin, and of divine aſſiſtance in order to our being made free from it, ſo clearly and fully revealed as it is in the Goſpel; which Chriſt publiſhed to the world, that all thoſe might have [g] *abundant conſolation, who fled for refuge to the hope that was ſet before them?* The diſcoveries of God's *grace*, ſo different from the gloomy diſpenſation of the *law*, muſt be exceeding acceptable to perſons, who being under diſtreſs of conſcience, and feeling the galling yoke and ſervitude of ſin, found little relief from the *law* of *Moſes*. And the

[f] Matt. xi. 28. [g] Heb. vi. 18.

ſame may be ſaid of ſuch as had lived under the *law* and *light* of *Nature*, which was ſtill more deficient in the grounds and methods of comfort. But though theſe were more immediately invited to *come to Chriſt that they might have reſt*, who were till then unacquainted with the Goſpel of peace, to whom therefore ſuch an invitation muſt be more than ordinarily ſeaſonable; if they were burdened with a ſenſe of ſin both its *guilt* and *power*, yet the mercy here offered extends to all others, even to thoſe who have ſinned againſt the *light* and *grace* of the Goſpel. Indeed, this is a very great aggravation of their ſins, but does not however render them unpardonable; nor ſo forfeit the aſſiſtances and conſolations of the *Holy Spirit*, that chriſtians who have led wicked lives, be they never ſo heartily ſorry for it, have no pretenſions to them. The Goſpel was not deſigned for *one* generation of men only, but for *all*; and 'tis the very nature of the Goſpel to be a doctrine of forgiveneſs and ſpiritual liberty. It ſaith to all real penitents, [h] *Be of good cheer, your ſins are forgiven you.* To all thoſe who are at war with ſin, [i] *The law of the Spirit of life which is in Chriſt Jeſus, ſhall free you from the law of ſin and death*, You that pray, and ſtrive, and

[h] Matt. ix. 2. [i] Rom. viii. 2.

and watch, ſhall not pray, and ſtrive, and watch in vain. But then they muſt not be too haſty, but wait till the days of their *mourning* are accompliſhed, and they are thoroughly prepared for conſolation. They muſt not think that a well eſtabliſhed hope is the work of a ſhort time, and the enemy preſently ſubdued; but with reſolution and prayer, they may be ſure they ſhall ſtruggle through all difficulties, and enjoy *the peace of God which paſſeth all underſtanding*. They may be ſure if [k] *they ſow in tears, they ſhall*, ſooner or later, *reap in joy. Bleſſed*, therefore, are all they who *mourn* by way of repentance for the errors of a ſinful life, *for they ſhall be comforted.* If the anguiſh and diſquietude of their ſpirits are not quite ſwallowed up in the joy of the Lord, yet they ſhall be conſiderably abated, and, at laſt, end in complete and everlaſting reſt.

HAVING conſidered the words as intended, of *particular* perſons, whether ſuch as are in *mourning* circumſtances and behave well in them; or are *mourning* for the ſins of their paſt lives; I proceed,

II. To conſider them in that view, which I believe to have been the *principal* in the deſign of our Saviour, *viz.* as *deſcriptive* of

[k] Pſal. cxxvi. 5.

all the true followers of Jeſus. And thus conſidered, they denote a *temper* of mind rather than the *act* of *mourning*.—I ſhall endeavour to explain this part of the chriſtian temper, and then diſcourſe a little concerning the *reward* of it.

I. I SHALL endeavour to explain this part of the chriſtian temper, and, as I paſs along, ſhow the propriety and reaſonableneſs of it. And here theſe *particulars*.—*Mourning*, as a temper of mind by which the genuine Diſciples of Chriſt are characterized, ſignifies a wiſe ſobriety of ſpirit in oppoſition to a ſenſual diſpoſition, or the immoderate love of carnal worldly pleaſure,—a mixture of religious ſadneſs and thoughtfulneſs in the habitual temper of the ſoul, ſuitable to the preſent melancholy ſtate of mankind, and the ſinfulneſs and miſery of this mortal life; which naturally implies in the laſt place,—ſuch a temper as knows how to comply, in a proper manner, with the invitations to mourning which occaſionally offer.

1. MOURNING, as a property of the chriſtian temper, ſignifies a *wiſe ſobriety of mind*, in oppoſition to a *looſe*, *ſenſual* diſpoſition, or the immoderate love of pleaſure. The character of the ſenſualiſt, as drawn in ſcripture, is, that [1] *his heart is in the houſe of mirth*,

[1] Eccleſ. vii. 4.

mirth, whoſe vain companions, whoſe converſation and way of paſſing time, he prefers to all others. There is no happineſs with him but in rioting and drunkenneſs, or ſuch like gratifications; which make him ſay to his ſoul, [m] *Soul take thine eaſe, eat, drink, and be merry.* He is one [n] *who loves pleaſure more than God*; not ſo much concerned to pleaſe his Maker as his carnal appetites; for the ſake of which he is willing to hazard the loſs of the divine favour. He is given up to his pleaſures, dwelleth careleſsly, [o] *walketh after his luſts*, and whatever he receives from the bounty of Providence, *conſumes it all upon them.* Such a character as this is ſufficiently expoſed by being deſcribed; for who does not ſee how unworthy it is of a *man*, much more of a *chriſtian?* The temper, oppoſite to this, I call *a wiſe ſobriety of ſpirit*; when perſons have the poſſeſſion of their own ſouls, carefully abſtaining from all unlawful pleaſures, and preſerving that moderation and temperance in reſpect of thoſe that are lawful, which reaſon and religion preſcribe. And the wiſdom of this ſobriety of ſpirit is eaſily ſhown, whether we conſider man as a *reaſonable*, or as an *immortal* Being.

[m] Luke xii. 19. [n] 2 Tim. iii. 4. [o] 2 Pet. iii. 2. James iv. 3.

1. A *ſobriety of ſpirit* in oppoſition to an immoderate love of *ſenſual* pleaſure, becomes a man as a *reaſonable* Being, and is therefore a mark of wiſdom. Reaſon is the diſtinguiſhing excellence of man; brutes have ſenſes, and ſome have their ſenſes in greater perfection than ours, but they want reaſon, or at leaſt that degree of it which is neceſſary to make them moral agents. In offending againſt reaſon, then we tranſgreſs the law and rule of our own nature. The mind is the man, which is the ground of the apoſtle's reaſoning, *Rom.* vii. 16, 17. *If I do that which I would not, I conſent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but ſin that dwelleth in me.* The rational principle within diſapproves the power which ſin has over me, and gives conſent to the goodneſs of the law, at the very time that I break it. But wherein does the wiſdom of this ſobriety of ſpirit, and the folly of the contrary ſenſual diſpoſition appear, as we are *reaſonable* Beings? many ways.—'Tis the privilege of a reaſonable Being, that he can reflect and conſider; and this ſobriety of ſpirit is a friend to reflection; as great a friend to it as ſenſuality is an enemy. To act, and not reflect upon our actions, to live without thinking, is to live and act like *beaſts*, not like *men*. The

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ſober man can retire into himſelf, recollect his thoughts, examine what objects are moſt worthy of his affection and purſuits, and in what way of life he may propoſe to find moſt content and ſatisfaction. His mind has its enjoyments as well as his body, and the former are thoſe which he prefers after the matureſt deliberation; he weighs the nature and conſequences of actions, calmly and impartially conſiders the influence which this or that courſe will have upon his health, his reputation, his worldly affairs; what profit he ſhall have of thoſe things which promiſe him preſent pleaſure, and whether, upon the whole, he ſhall not be a loſer by them. Such a man [p] *fore-ſeeth the evil, and hideth himſelf*; he eſcapeth many dangers by his circumſpection and vigilance; and walketh ſafely, becauſe he walketh cautiouſly. But, as to the lover of pleaſure, it is quite otherwiſe; he hates reflection, and renders himſelf more and more incapable of it; ſhuns himſelf, cannot be perſuaded to think ſoberly of any thing; looks only to what is preſent, and deſpiſes the future; and thus goes on till he finds himſelf plunged in difficulties and troubles, out of which he knows not how to free himſelf; having waſted that ſubſtance which ſhould have ſupplied his plea-

[p] Prov. xxii. 3.

pleaſures, made himſelf as contemptible as he was before worthleſs, ruined his health, filled his mind with ſhame and uneaſineſs, and his body with pains and diſeaſes, and, at a great deal of expence, procured a ſhort and miſerable life. The miſchiefs flowing from a life of pleaſure, are, in a very ſtrong and affecting manner, repreſented in *Sampſon*'s love of *Dalilah*; in the hiſtory of which we ſee, how pleaſure entices men, robs them of their ſtrength, betrays them into the hands of their worſt enemies, and, at laſt, to the arms of death.—*Again*; 'tis the part of reaſon to command the paſſions; the contrary would be as unſeemly, as for a prince to be controuled by the meaneſt of his ſubjects. Now, in the ſober mind, this ſubordination of the appetites and paſſions to the nobler faculties is preſerved. Such a mind is the *maſter*, not the *ſlave*, and can *uſe the world without abuſing it*; dwell in a body of fleſh, and not be carnalized by it. This is a very great advantage which the ſenſualiſt wants; who, while [q] *he promiſes liberty* to others, and impoſes upon them by this fooliſh pretence, *is himſelf the ſervant of corruption*; ſince *of whom a man is overcome, of the ſame is he brought into bondage.* 'Tis truly ſaid of ſuch a one, that

[q] 2 Pet. ii. 19.

that *he* [r] *serveth divers lusts and pleasures*; he has as many masters as he has lusts, all which command him in their turns. And is not this a reproach to a man, to have his understanding dethroned, and lust and passion placed in its room? to employ what little reason he has in *making provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof*, and contriving means how to gratify the basest inclinations?—*Again*; since even irrational creatures are by an instinct of nature taught to seek their own preservation, it would be strange if reason should not study to preserve itself. A reasonable Being cannot act reasonably, if he does otherwise. This law of self-preservation is observed by the sober mind, but not by the sensual. Where there is a sobriety of spirit, reason is continually cultivated and improved; the understanding is more inlightened, and the judgment more correct and true, and all the mental faculties attend in their strength. But how different are the effects, where a sensual disposition prevails? the mind is more and more darkened, reason impaired, the judgment perverted, and the man becomes *weak* as well as *wicked*. And what now can be more apparent than the wisdom of this sobriety of spirit, if we consider man as a *reasonable* Being?

[r] Tit. iii. 3.

Being? Reaſon teaches a man to paſs his life with as much inward ſatisfaction and tranquility as he can; and this the man of a ſober mind does, while the ſenſual ſinner, the man abandoned to his luſts and pleaſures, is continually thwarting his own deſign, which as he profeſſes, is to live happily. We may, therefore, ſay as the [f] *wiſe man, I ſaid of laughter it is mad, and of mirth what does it?*

2. A *ſobriety of ſpirit*, in oppoſition to the immoderate love of *ſenſual* pleaſure, becomes a man yet more as an *immortal* Being, and is therefore, in that view, a greater inſtance of wiſdom. And wonder not that I call man an *immortal* Being; for, as the mind is properly the man, ſo it is evident, both from reaſon and ſcripture, that the mind of man is immortal. Well then, if my ſoul be immortal, if when my [t] *body returns to its earth, my ſoul muſt return to God who gave it*, and be accountable to him for the part it has acted in the body; the queſtion is, which will argue moſt wiſdom, to have my mind compoſed to a juſt ſobriety, or to give myſelf up to a life of ſenſual eaſe and indulgence, alike regardleſs of my preſent and my future intereſt? Is

[f] Eccleſ. ii. 1. [t] Eccleſ. xii. 7.

Is it not fit, if there be another world, that I ſhould provide for it? if I ſhall exiſt out of the body, is it not fit that I ſhould think what kind of exiſtence it is like to be, happy or miſerable? or am I indifferent whether happineſs or miſery is my final lot? or ſince that can never be, do I make myſelf believe that whatever my behaviour may be at preſent, it will not affect my condition in the next life? if I could be ſo void of reaſon as to believe this, that will make no real alteration in the thing itſelf. Let me therefore ſit down and ſeriouſly think, which is the beſt preparation for eternity. But, alas! this very thing which is previouſly neceſſary to a right preparation for another world, is what a man is not capable of, who is ſwallowed up in the pleaſures of this life. 'Tis, without doubt, neceſſary that he ſhould ſpend ſome time in ſerious thought and meditation; but how ſhall he do this while he minds nothing but his pleaſures? He muſt, therefore, begin with a retirement from his vain pleaſures, at leaſt for ſome time, that he may be able to make a right judgment in this important queſtion. And if he only abſtains from his pleaſures till he has fully ſettled this queſtion, *what he muſt do to be ſaved*, he will ſee the neceſſity of never returning

to

to them more. For, alas! a life of pleaſure is not a life for any one to lead, who thinks and hopes to be ſaved. We muſt have a diſpoſition of mind ſuited to the employments and pleaſures of heaven, before we can be admitted there; a diſpoſition for praiſe, and adoration, and thankſgiving, for the ſight and fruition of a holy God, and the ſociety of ſpirits made perfect in holineſs. And, can any one imagine that a life of ſenſual pleaſure, is a fit introduction to the life of heaven? Can they, who are [u] *lovers of pleaſure more than lovers of God*, take up their reſt in God as the center of their ſouls, their ſupreme portion and happineſs? do not their ſouls tend quite another way? are they not quite alienated in their minds, by their love of pleaſure, from all the exerciſes of the divine life, ſuch as faith, and hope, and love, the worſhip of God in ſpirit and in truth, a devout participation of the holy ſupper, and the meditation of heavenly things? are not all theſe a burden, and not a pleaſure, to the ſenſual mind? Men of this character are not merely *ſtrangers* but *enemies* to God and religion, ſecretly ſuch, whatever they may be in profeſſion to the *power* of religion, if not to the *form* of it, which

[u] 2 Tim. iii. 4, 5.

which will do no man any great service. These two are joined together; [w] *sensual, not having the Spirit*; and he who [x] *has not the Spirit of God, can be none of his*, nor in the least qualified for a spiritual felicity. No; the sensual sinner is far from having the temper of heaven; the paradise of *Mahomet* might suit him, but not that place which *Christ is gone before to prepare* for his faithful followers. He, who would [y] *ascend* to that *holy hill, must have a pure heart, mortify his members which are upon the earth, crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts*, and be, as it were, dead to the pleasures of the world. In his judgment, a life of pleasure, instead of being a happy life, is the most remote from it; it is his opinion, that every one [z] *who liveth in pleasure, is dead while he liveth*; and therefore, that he may live indeed, to God and for God, as an heir of heaven and a candidate for immortality, he considers that he is but [a] *a stranger and pilgrim upon earth*; and in that quality *abstains from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.*—Thus, as an *immortal* Being, it appears to be every man's wisdom to get a *wise sobriety of spirit*, in opposition to a *sensual* disposition, or the immoderate

[w] Jude ver. 19. [x] Rom. viii. 9. [y] Psal. xxiv. 3, 4. Col. iii. 5. [z] 1 Tim. v. 6. [a] 1 Pet. ii. 11.

moderate love of pleaſure. But *ſobriety of ſpirit* is not all intended in the text, 'tis rather preſuppoſed to a *ſpirit of mourning*, than the thing itſelf. I therefore add,

2. THERE muſt be a *mixture of religious ſadneſs* (if I may ſo call it) and *thoughtfulneſs* in the habitual temper of the ſoul, ſuited to the preſent melancholy ſtate of mankind, and the ſinfulneſs and miſery of this mortal life.—But of this, and the other parts of the ſubject, in my next diſcourſe.

SER-

SERMON XIII.

The Bleſſedneſs of thoſe that mourn.

MATTH. v. 4.

Bleſſed are they that mourn, for they ſhall be comforted.

IN the preceeding diſcourſe, I propoſed to explain the character of the *mourners*, whom our Saviour pronounces *bleſſed*; and then to repreſent their *bleſſedneſs*. I have,

I. FOR explaining the character obſerved, that the words may be conſidered in *two* views.

1. As intended of ſome *particular ſorts* of perſons; and thus they ſignify ſuch whoſe *circumſtances are mournful*, or the afflicted who bear and improve well their afflicti-

ons; and thoſe, who by the *ſorrows* of *repentance*, are endeavouring to recover themſelves out of a ſinful ſtate. Or,

2. As *deſcriptive* of all the true followers of *Jeſus*; and this I apprehend their principal meaning. Thus conſidered, they denote a *temper* of mind, rather than the *act* of *mourning*. This temper I propoſed to explain, and, as I went along, to ſhow the propriety and reaſonableneſs of it under the following particulars.

1. *MOURNING*, as a property of the chriſtian temper, ſignifies a *wiſe ſobriety of mind*, in oppoſition to a *looſe ſenſual* diſpoſition, or the *immoderate* love of pleaſure. This I have explained and recommended as becoming men, conſidered either as *reaſonable*, or *immortal* Beings.—I proceed,

2. THERE muſt be a *mixture of religious ſadneſs* (if I may ſo call it) and *thoughtfulneſs* in the habitual temper of the ſoul, ſuited to the preſent melancholy ſtate of mankind, and the ſinfulneſs and miſery of this mortal Life. There is a cloud hangs over the preſent ſtate, which renders the proſpect much leſs delightful to a ſerious mind. For,

1. THE ſinfulneſs of the preſent ſtate, is a juſt ſubject of *lamentation*. Man, 'tis true, is the workmanſhip of God, and all that befals him, or is done by him, is under the

the direction of an over-ruling Providence; ſo that of all the things that are before us, there is none that is not either wiſely *ordained* or *permitted* by God. But men have made themſelves very different creatures from what God made them. The whole race is ſadly degenerated, they are almoſt *all gone aſtray*; not becauſe they were under a *neceſſity* of doing ſo, but becauſe they have made a wrong uſe of that *freedom* which God has been pleaſed to endow them with, that they might be proper ſubjects of moral government, and of a ſtate of trial; for there can be no trial where there is no liberty. But is this then all that God has done for men, to put it into their power to make themſelves guilty and miſerable? far be it from us that we ſhould think ſo; he hath ſet *life* as well as *death before us*; death, that we might avoid it, life, that we might chuſe it. He leaves not thoſe of any age or nation without ſufficient motives and incouragements to the duty he requires of them; nor are the *terms* of acceptance ſet above their reach, that aſſiſtance being ſuppoſed which God will never deny to the humble ſupplicant, the ſincere and upright ſoul; and therefore, the chriſtian mourner is far from accuſing God, or falling out with Providence upon the account of thoſe many moral diſorders

which are broken in upon the world. Sin is not the off-ſpring of the *divine* but *human* will. But ſtill, how juſt reaſons ſoever God has for *permitting* moral evil or ſin, (for he does no more than permit it) it is a melancholy thought, that *the wickedneſs of man ſhould be ſo great upon the earth.* We, who belong to this ſinful ſpecies of creatures, ought not to be unaffected with ſuch a conſideration as this, eſpecially if we have in any degree contributed, by our bad example, to the growth of vice and immorality. But, ſuppoſing we have not, can we think of what man is become, and not lament over him? wretched creature, how art thou fallen, who waſt [a] *made a little lower than the angels, and crowned with glory and honour!* Can we have any love for our fellow-men (and he does not deſerve the name of a man who has not) and not pity them, at the ſame time that we condemn and abominate their vices? or can we have any love to God, and not grieve for the diſhonour done to his holy name, and the many violations of his righteous and equitable laws? that ſuch multitudes ſhould be ingaged in a rebellion againſt their Maker, and that there ſhould be ſo few to riſe up for him againſt the evil-doers? Surely, this is a mournful ſpeculation for a lover of

[a] Pſal. viii. 5.

of God, and of his own kind! The leſs tainted any one is with this epidemical diſeaſe, the more tenderly concerned he will be for thoſe who are ready to die of it. The moſt virtuous and religious will moſt lament the prevalency of irreligion and vice. [b] *Rivers of water*, ſays the pious *Pſalmiſt*, *run down mine eyes, becauſe men keep not thy law.* Beſides this, it is to be conſidered, that the moſt virtuous are but *imperfectly* ſo, they are *ſincere*, but not *innocent*; they have many ſins of their own for which to mourn, and they do unfeignedly mourn for them: they mourn the many defects, their ſmall proficiency in the knowledge and practice of religion, the weakneſs of their faith, the languors of their love, the coldneſs of their zeal, their indevotion in duties, the remains of either worldlineſs, carnality, impurity, or other ſins, under which they labour; for all theſe, though infirmities, and conſiſtent with their covenant-relation to God, yet, as far as they are owing to ſinful neglects and indulgencies, they are truly grieved and humbled. To reflect that the mercies of God, and the love of a Saviour, and all the motives and aſſiſtances of the Goſpel, ſhould have produced no greater effect, is ſome reſtraint upon the joy and gladneſs of their hearts.

[b] Pſal. cxix. 136.

2. FROM the *ſinfulneſs* of the preſent ſtate, let us paſs to the *infelicities* of it. [c] *Man is born to trouble as the ſparks fly upwards*; and by multiplying his tranſgreſſions he multiplies his ſorrows. What a ſcene of miſery have we before us? enough to draw tears from the eyes of thoſe who attentively conſider it, if they are of a *humane*, and much more if they are of a *chriſtian* diſpoſition, and to pierce their very hearts. Every place full of complaints, and the whole world a kind of hoſpital of the ſick, the maimed, and the diſeaſed; nations born to ſervitude, groaning under the yoke of the proud and cruel oppreſſor, laid waſte by war, or famine, or peſtilence, born in darkneſs, nurſ's'd up in ſuperſtition; kingdoms deſtroyed, and the people carried into captivity; families ruined, the cries of the poor, the tears of the fatherleſs and the widow, and the ſobs of thoſe who are in anguiſh and bitterneſs of ſpirit: not to ſpeak of the *imaginary* evils of life which owe their being to fancy and miſtake, how numberleſs are the *real* evils that are ſown in it! pains of body, ſtraitneſs of outward circumſtances, frequent and cutting diſappointments, death of relations, loſs or deſertion of friends, and the like, the very kinds of which are not eaſy to be reckoned up. Inſtances of this nature occur every

[c] Job v. 7.

every day, the life of man is filled with them.—Indeed, we are to observe here as before, that the Providence of God is not to be blamed, since the part which that has in the *afflictive* events of life is the result of the most perfect *wisdom*, and therefore cannot infringe upon *equity* and *goodness*: and the good man is so fully persuaded of the truth of this, that he is ready to vindicate all the ways of God to man, which he esteems to be exactly *equal*, their *seeming* inequality arising wholly from the *real* inequality of the ways of mankind. All *natural* evils had their birth from *moral*, neither as to the degree of them do they ever exceed their cause, but fall very short of it; and besides that, are mercifully intended by the wise Governour of the world for the cure of mens vices, or at least to keep them from growing worse. As great as the dissolution of manners now is, if there was nothing to stop men in their career, nothing to trouble them and force them upon consideration, it would be much greater. But, however, though the sufferings of life are *necessary* for the chastisement of those who undergo them, or for a warning to others; yet 'tis sad, to consider that men should make them *necessary*. A generous heart cannot but be sensibly touched with the miseries of his fellow-creatures, were he never so in-

tirely exempted from them himſelf; and 'tis, undoubtedly, our duty to be ſo; ſuch a mixture of ſadneſs in a man's temper, ariſing from a comprehenſive view of the miſeries of mankind, is no diſgrace to any one, nor ſhould any one, if he could, ſtrive to free himſelf from it: but then, I call it only a *mixture* of ſadneſs, becauſe it ſhould not *over-power* the ſoul, and prevail ſo far as to incapacitate it for celebrating thoſe [d] *tender mercies of God, which are over all his works.* The chriſtian mourner is not ſo intirely taken up in obſerving and lamenting his own follies and ſins, or thoſe of other men, and the numerous evils which ſin has brought into the world; but that he is ready to do juſtice to the examples of virtue and religion which are in the world, and to the grace of God which ſhines out in ſuch examples: he rejoices in them, eſpecially in the conſciouſneſs of his own integrity, and acknowledges, with all thankfulneſs and joy, the many bleſſings which the bountiful hand of God ſhowers down upon an unworthy race of creatures, the merciful ingredients which are thrown into our cups, more than barely neceſſary to temper the bitterneſs of it. We muſt, therefore, remember that it is only a *mixture* of *ſadneſs* that is required, anſwering to the *mixture*

[d] Pſal. cxlv. 9.

ture of *good and evil* in the life of man. Nor is this *mixture* to be allowed any further than it is of uſe, ſince God expects from no man that he ſhould ſorrow for ſorrowing ſake. And then farther, that we may not miſtake in the nature of it, I call it a *religious* ſadneſs; religion muſt have a greater ſhare in it than natural conſtitution. Some men are naturally of a ſoft and compaſſionate temper, and can ſay as the old man in the * *Roman Poet*, *Homo ſum, humani a me nihil alienum puto*; "I am a "man, and therefore think nothing fo- "reign to myſelf which concerns my fel- "low-men." This, as far as it is purely *natural*, is a *felicity* of temper, *amiable* indeed, but not properly *commendable*; for to ſpeak truly, we are to be commended for nothing, but what is ſome way or other the effect of our own choice. This natural goodneſs of temper, may be cheriſhed and improved into a ſocial virtue, and then it is worthy of praiſe; but if it goes no farther, if the conſiderations and views of religion have no influence upon it, it has no title to that *bleſſedneſs*, which is pronounced in the text upon them that mourn. Natural generoſity, and the ties of ſociety are not excluded; nay, theſe are a very good foundation to build upon; but the perfection of that

* *Terence. Heautont.*

that temper of ſoul which I have been deſcribing is deriv'd from religion. We are to conſider men and things in the light of *faith*, that is, in their relation to God and another world; mourning over the ſins and vices of men, becauſe God is thereby offended and diſhonoured, and their ſalvation indangered; and the miſeries of life, becauſe the diſpleaſure of God is ſeen in them, and they are only introductory to much ſorer puniſhments, which will be inflicted upon all impenitent ſinners. We are to be mov'd and acted by the nobleſt principles the *love of God*, and of *our neighbour*; a love which regards not ſo much the *temporal* as the *ſpiritual* and *eternal* intereſts of mankind: ſuch a love as this muſt ſadden our hearts, and make them bleed for the evils which we ſee men ſuffering or bringing upon themſelves.—Where there is ſuch a *mixture of religious ſadneſs and thoughtfulneſs* in the habitual temper of the ſoul, ſuited to the preſent melancholy ſtate of mankind, the ſinfulneſs and miſery of this mortal life, there will naturally follow.

3. SUCH a temper as knows how to *comply* in a proper manner with the *invitations to mourning*, which occaſionally preſent themſelves. According to the obſervation of [e] *Solomon*, *There is a time to mourn*, a time when *mourning*

[e] Eccleſ. iii. 4.

mourning is more peculiarly in ſeaſon. The chriſtian mourner obſerves every intimation of Providence to this effect, and much more the louder calls of it. Are the *Judgments* of God abroad *in the earth?* Is he *terrible in his doings towards the children of men?* Tho' *other* nations, and not *our own*, be immediately concerned, if we are of this chriſtian temper, we ſhall not ſtand aloof from their ſore, much leſs boaſt and inſult when deſolation cometh upon them, but ſhall ſadden at the relation of their diſtant ſufferings; and even tho' they are *enemies*, our prayer will be for them in their calamities. However we ſhall think ourſelves more nearly intereſted, and more ſtrongly obliged to compaſſion, if our *native* land be the ſcene of the divine Judgments. We ſhall not look on as idle and unconcerned ſpectators when our dear country lies a bleeding; either under the immediate ſtroke of God, or torn and wounded by the unnatural ſtruggles and animoſities of its own ſons. Our compaſſionate Redeemer beholding *Jeruſalem*, wept over it, ſaying, [f] *If thou hadſt known, even thou, at leaſt in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes!* He lamented their blindneſs and hardneſs of heart, and all thoſe crying ſins, particularly their rejection of him their *Meſſiah*,

[f] Luke xix. 42.

ſiah, by which they were pulling down deſtruction upon their own heads. That which ſtrikes deepeſt into the heart of the pious mourner, is when *religion* is in a dying condition, when there is a more than ordinary falling away from the principles and practices of Chriſtianity, when the diſciples of *Jeſus*, inſtead of following that command of their Maſter *to love one another*, are divided into various and angry parties, which make it their buſineſs to blacken and miſrepreſent one another, and are continually plotting each others miſchief and ruin; and by this means, not only neglect their common intereſt, but do it the greateſt prejudice: when the chriſtian church, or any conſiderable part of it, is in a ſtate of perſecution, when juſt men are delivered into the hands of the wicked, and truth put to flight by prevailing errors; at ſuch a proſpect of things as this, the ſoul of the true chriſtian mourns within him, and his eyes pour out tears unto God. We read of [g] *Ezra*, that he *mourned becauſe of the tranſgreſſion of them that had been carried away captive.* And indeed, it would be a crime to be otherwiſe affected in ſuch circumſtances; which is the reaſon of the [h] *Prophet*'s denouncing a *woe to them that are at eaſe in Zion.* Nay, we ſhall not only mourn with the *publick*, but with

[g] Ezra x. 6. [h] Amos vi. 1.

with *private* perſons too. If a friend, or an acquaintance, be under ſome great affliction, we ſhall take the infection of their ſorrows, and mov'd by this inward ſympathy, ſhall be at the ſame time more deſirous and better able to comfort them; as it is ſaid of *Job*'s three friends, that [i] *they made an appointment together, to come and mourn with him, and to comfort him*; to mourn with him in order to comfort him. And all this is agreeable to the advice of the Apoſtle, [k] *to rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep.* The *Stoick* may call theſe the *weakneſſes* of human nature, and do all he can to diveſt himſelf of them; the *Chriſtian* eſteems it the glory of his religion, that it cheriſhes all thoſe kind affections, and improves upon the tenderneſs of nature. In a word, are we afflicted ourſelves in our perſons or families, by bodily ſickneſs, by the death of ſome near relative, by ill ſucceſs in our worldly affairs, and the like? we ſhall not be among thoſe who [l] *deſpiſe the chaſtning of the Lord*, we ſhall take notice of his hand when 'tis lifted up againſt us, and [m] *humble ourſelves under it*; it will be our endeavour to accommodate ourſelves to the circumſtances we are in, and to have a temper adapted to the dealings of Providence

[i] Job ii. 11. [k] Rom. xii. 15. [l] Heb. xii. 5. [m] James iv. 10.

dence with us; and above all, we ſhall by our ſufferings be put in mind to ſorrow for our ſins, and have our hatred againſt them inflam'd as the greateſt of all evils, both in their own nature, and as the cauſe of all others.

HAVING thus explained the character of the chriſtian *mourner*, I am

II. To diſcourſe a little concerning his *reward. Bleſſed are they that mourn, for they ſhall be comforted.*

1. COMFORT *immediately* ſprings out of ſuch mourning. It may look like a contradiction for joy and ſadneſs to reſide together in the ſame breaſt, and would really be one, if either of them was compleat; ſince perfect joy will not admit of the leaſt ſadneſs, nor perfect ſadneſs of the leaſt joy; but where neither of them is carried to the greateſt height, they may be companions one to the other. And indeed, in this preſent variable and mixed ſtate of things, 'tis very common for contrary paſſions to be blended together, and exert their joint influence upon the ſoul. Thus *fear* has a mixture of *hope*, and *hope* of *fear*; without which one of them would degenerate into *deſpair*, and the other take the name of *certainty*. 'Tis no unuſual thing to be angry with

with thoſe very perſons upon one account, whom we pity upon another: neither the characters of men, nor the events of life, are intirely uniform; and hence it comes, that as there is a variety of paſſions or affections, ſo theſe paſſions mingle with and run one into the other. There are no two paſſions in which this more remarkably happens than in *grief* and *joy*. The very ſame occurrence, under different views and conſiderations, ſhall very powerfully move both theſe ſprings. Of this we have a moſt remarkable example in the hiſtory of [n] *Joſeph* and his being ſold into *Egypt*, where he met with ſeveral turns of Providence; till, at laſt, he came to be the *ſecond* man in the kingdom: and particularly of his brethrens coming thither to buy corn; when he ſaw them, and heard them talking one with another of their former barbarous uſage of him (little imagining he underſtood what they ſaid) *he turned himſelf about from them and wept.* It was, without doubt, a great pleaſure to *Joſeph* to ſee his brethren after ſo many years abſence, notwithſtanding their unkindneſs to him; to find them penitent, and to hear of the life and welfare of his aged father; and yet it was ſuch a pleaſure as made him burſt into tears. He was more ſenſibly mov'd at the ſight of his brother

[n] Geneſ. chap. xxxvii, and following.

ther *Benjamin*, for having aſk'd them whether this was their younger brother, and ſpoken thoſe few words to him, *God be gracious to thee my Son*; it is ſaid, *he made haſte for his bowels did yern upon his brother, and he ſought where to weep, and he entred into his chamber and wept there.* And thus when he could no longer refrain from making himſelf known to his brethren, the *Hiſtorian* ſaith *he wept again*; his ſoul was even overcome with the ſtrong workings of ſeveral paſſions. And how often do we ſee a ſurprize of happineſs, ſudden and extraordinary emotions of joy, expreſſing themſelves by tears? ſo that 'tis very poſſible for perſons to have comfort while they are mourning; and which is more, that very temper, which is here intended by *mourning*, miniſters ground of great conſolation; it is not barely reconcileable with comfort, but is the cauſe and foundation of it. For what is this but the very temper we ought to be in? 'tis the temper of a wiſe and good man, one who knows himſelf and the world, conſiders his own frailty and ſinfulneſs, and as a fellow-member ſympathizes with the whole body of mankind. 'Tis a reaſonable and humane, as well as chriſtian diſpoſition; it ſhews a good underſtanding, and a high degree of benevolence; and muſt not a conſciouſneſs of this diſpoſition afford great

great ſatisfaction? can a man act and behave like a man, and not be pleas'd with himſelf when he does ſo? can he feel the beſt affections that belong to human nature ſtirring within him, and not rejoice at it? can his heart overflow with kindneſs and good-will to his fellow-creatures, eſpecially in diſtreſs, and not be itſelf refreſhed with the delightful ſtream? is it nothing to be approved to one's own mind? to deſerve the moſt amiable character that a man can be known by, of a ſoul which claims kindred with all other ſouls, and makes their intereſts, and joys, and ſorrows its own? what are the pleaſures of the gay, the wanton and frolickſome; much more of the debauched, the ſelfiſh, the malicious, the revengeful, compar'd with theſe? can a heart which has no ſoftneſs but for pleaſure, which never yields but to temptation, in other reſpects hard and unrelenting, can ſuch a heart have a capacity to reliſh thoſe divine joys which flow ſpontaneouſly from the ſober, the ſerious, and the benevolent temper? It is an obſervation verified by every day's experience, that [o] *even in laughter the heart is ſorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heavineſs.* Where the pleaſure is mean and low, and much more where it is criminal, a man's conſcience reproaches him with it, he can never give

[o] Prov. xiv. 13.

his underſtanding to fall in intirely with his paſſions; beſides which, there are remains of better inclinations in moſt men, which make them uneaſy in the purſuit of thoſe which are vicious. Here, on the contrary, it may be truly ſaid, that in the midſt of *mourning* the heart is joyful, and the preſent effect of ſuch ingenuous and commendable ſorrow is gladneſs of ſoul.

2. BESIDES this comfort, which is the immediate and natural product of chriſtian *mourning*, there is another which comes from the *love* and *approbation* of our *fellow-creatures*, and from their *ready aſſiſtance* as often as it is needed. No man is more generally eſteemed, no man more univerſally beloved, than one of a tender and compaſſionate diſpoſition, who enters into the concerns of other men, puts his ſoul in their ſoul's ſtead, and, in the whole of his behaviour, appears to have a due conſideration of that common nature, and of thoſe common evils and calamities by which mankind are link'd together. Such a one ſteals the hearts of all who know him, and binds them to him by a kind of irreſiſtible charm. And foraſmuch as the deſire of mutual love and eſteem is natural to all men, he who is ſo happy as to deſerve and poſſeſs a great ſhare of both theſe, cannot but have rejoicing and comfort in himſelf upon that account.

count. In the courſe of human affairs, he may fall into adverſity, and ſo become the object of other peoples compaſſion; and he is the moſt likely perſon to have it, and together with it, all the help which his caſe demands: having expreſſed a readineſs to *mourn* with others in their diſtreſſes, he will not be left to *mourn* alone in the day of his affliction; and tho' this may not altogether remove the burden, yet 'twill very much lighten it. It is no little comfort to a man, when he ſees others take part with him in his ſorrows, and, according to their ability, willing to ſuccour him; eſpecially when he is able to regard this, as no more than a proper return for his own readineſs in the days of his proſperity, to ſhow compaſſion and kindneſs to others; being able to ſay as [p] *Job, I delivered the poor that cried, the fatherleſs, and him that had none to help him; the bleſſing of him that was ready to periſh came upon me, and I cauſed the widows heart to ſing for joy.*

3. THE chriſtian mourner is intitled to that comfort which more directly flows from the fountain of all bleſſedneſs. [q] *The God of patience and conſolation, who comforts them that are caſt down,* will be their comforter; for [r] *thus ſaith the high and holy One who inhabiteth*

[p] Job xxix. 12, 13. [q] Rom. xv. 5. 2 Cor. vii. 6. [r] Iſa. lvii. 15.

habiteth eternity, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him alſo that is of a contrite heart, to revive the ſpirit of the humble, and to revive the hearts of the contrite ones. Their own experience ſhall convince them that this temper is exceeding acceptable to their Maker, and renders them ſo. He delights in it as a temper of mind becoming creatures ſituated as we are; and what he delights in, he will immediately reward with inward joy and ſatisfaction. He, [f] *the God of hope will fill them with peace and joy in believing, that they may abound in hope through the power of the Holy-Ghoſt.* That the omnipreſent God has ſuch an acceſs to the mind, and can cheer and invigorate it in all its powers and faculties, cannot be doubted; as there is very little reaſon to queſtion that he *actually* does this in a greater or leſs degree, according to the preparation the ſoul is in for theſe manifeſtations of the divine favour, the need it has of them, their agreement with a ſtate of trial, and the tendency of this joy to promote the ſeveral virtues of the chriſtian life.

4. IN the life to come, thoſe words *bleſſed are they that mourn for they ſhall be comforted,* will receive their utmoſt accompliſhment, for then all *mourning*, the cauſes of it being removed, ſhall ceaſe for ever; not

[f] Rom. xv. 13.

not one ſigh, or tear, or ſad complaint. Heaven is the proper region of joy; love, and joy, and admiration, are the only affections known there; the rivers of pleaſure run pure and unmixed from the throne of God. And this being the final ſtate of man, and a ſtate deſigned to laſt for ever, it is apparent, that the deſign of God's making this ſhort life a time of *mourning*, was, its being both a *ſinful* ſtate, and a ſtate of *trial*, for one more *perfect* and *happy*; not from any pleaſure that the Creator has in the ſufferings of his creatures, for then he would not appoint that they ſhould end with this life, and, after that, be ſwallowed up in an eternity of bliſs. No; God made man to be happy, and he would make him happy immediately, did not his wiſdom, as Governor of the world, judge it more fit and proper, that his fidelity and obedience ſhould be firſt of all ſufficiently tried, and what ſins he was guilty of in this mortal life, ſhould (if I might be allowed the expreſſion) be expiated by the ſorrows of it. And *bleſſed are they that mourn* now, who not only patiently ſubmit to that portion of troubles and afflictions which Providence aſſigns them, but ſeriouſly reflecting upon the nature of the preſent ſtate, endeavour to ſuit their habitual temper and behaviour to it: theſe ſhall have their full reward, *good mea-*

ſure, preſſed down and running over, ſhall be given into their boſoms; and when the laughter of the wicked is turned into *mourning*, their ſorrows ſhall be converted into joy, *they ſow'd in tears, they ſhall reap in joy*; they denied themſelves *the pleaſures of ſin which were but for a ſeaſon*, and ſhall therefore receive life, and bleſſedneſs, and glory everlaſting.

LET us now conſider the reflections which naturally ariſe from this ſubject. And,

1. WHAT has been ſaid, is an abundant *vindication* of our divine Maſter, in making this a duty of his religion, that we ſhould *mourn*, and affixing a *bleſſedneſs* to the diſcharge of it. Chriſtianity is not only to be juſtified herein, but appears the more excellent and honourable. The heart of man is ſtrangely vain, has an averſion to every thing which tends to damp its fooliſh mirth, and ſhrinks back from the firſt appearance of a ſorrowful object. Had our Maſter given the reins to this vanity, he might have been more welcome to ſome, but would really have been no friend to mankind, and, by all impartial judges, muſt have been condemned as an impoſtor. Inſtead of thus pleaſing and flattering men to their ruin, he puts them under a ſeverer diſcipline, and preſcribes them a method for the attainment

ment of tranquility and happineſs *leſs grateful* for the preſent, but *more certain* in the iſſue. 'Tis a wiſe ſaying of a very wiſe man, that [t] *'tis better to go to the houſe of mourning than to the houſe of feaſting*; that is, there is more inſtruction and profit in converſing at proper times with mournful objects, than in running on thoughtleſs in a continued courſe of ungoverned mirth and frolick: and had he himſelf practiſed upon this rule, it would have prevented a great deal of ſhame and vexation which he incurred for want of attending to it. A wiſer than *Solomon* repeats much the ſame advice, and kept cloſer to it in his own practice. The example of Chriſt was never wonting to inforce the moſt difficult and ſelf-denying of his precepts; and when we conſider both in one and the ſame view, we muſt acknowledge that *never man ſpake as this man*, and that the chriſtian religion is juſt ſuch an inſtitution as mankind needed, being alike ſuited to the nature of man, and the circumſtances of the preſent life, to promote the practice of every human and divine virtue, and to prepare us for the moſt exalted happineſs of which we are capable; a happineſs of which the world never had a juſt and clear idea, till it was given them by the Author of our moſt holy faith.

[t] Eccleſ. vii. 2.

2. By the foregoing diſcourſe, we are inabled to diſcern and avoid thoſe extremes into which men are too apt to run in this matter. Some ſet up a life of pleaſure as the only happy life, while others regard all pleaſure as a crime. Of theſe two common extremes the former is the moſt dangerous to the ſouls of men, the latter moſt diſgraceful to religion, when that is apprehended to countenance it; whereas, in truth, religion rightly underſtood, forbids both. As for a perpetual indulgence to pleaſure, it could not be innocent, though the pleaſures we indulged to were ſo in themſelves; for, 'tis not for a *ſinner* to ſtudy nothing elſe but how he ſhall *pleaſe himſelf*, and forget both himſelf and his preſent condition: a life thus abandoned to pleaſure and amuſement, can never be reconciled to ſtrict virtue; ſuch perſons can have no tolerable notion of it, and much leſs any inclination to practiſe it, there being in the preſent weak and corrupt ſtate, ſomething of difficulty and ſelf-denial attending the ways of virtue and religion, eſpecially at the firſt entrance. Were it therefore poſſible, that a perſon, devoted to his pleaſures, ſhould conſtantly abſtain from thoſe that were vicious and forbidden, yet he could be no *chriſtian*, as long as the pleaſures of ſenſe had ſuch an intire aſcendant over him; and how much worſe then muſt

muſt it be when the pleaſures themſelves are ſinful, as well as his exceſſive indulgence to them; which is always the caſe when a man makes pleaſure the very end of his Being, and ſcope of all his actions and purſuits. The other extreme is, it muſt be confeſs'd, leſs fatal, but, however, of very bad conſequence both to men'ſelves and to religion: I ſpeak not of thoſe *mourners* whoſe hearts ſecretly fret againſt Providence, and who can ſcarce refrain their tongues ſometimes from hard ſpeeches againſt their Maker; theſe are not ſo properly *mourners* as *murmurers*, perſons whoſe diſcontent aggravates the evils of life, leſſens its advantages, and tempts them to bring a railing accuſation againſt the equity and goodneſs of the divine government. Where there is the loweſt degree of true piety, ſuch a conduct as this cannot be thought of without abhorrence. What I mean, therefore is, when perſons imagine they ſhow their religion in being moroſe, and ſevere, and melancholy, when a chearful look or thought is regarded as an approach to ſin, if not a direct tranſgreſſion of the law, and they ſo *mourn* as to *refuſe to be comforted.* Either this total renunciation of the moſt innocent delights of life is no chriſtian duty, or it will be im-

impoſſible to give any rational and conſiſtent account of thoſe many Texts of ſcripture, in which a life of religion is repreſented as abounding with pleaſure, and the comforts and injoyments of this life are urged as arguments of the goodneſs of God to mankind; which they would not be, if we were to take no pleaſure in them. To which might be added, the example of our [u] Lord himſelf, who declared the innocence of *feaſting* upon ſome occaſions, by affording his own preſence at a nuptial entertainment, and ſupporting its chearfulneſs and mirth by *turning water into wine*. Generally ſuch falſe notions of religion proceed from an unhappy natural temper, and when the temper of religion is ſuppoſed to be the ſame with that of thoſe men, they, who before were not very well diſpoſed to it, have their prejudices and averſion againſt it hereby increaſed. Did we conſider this as we ought, we ſhould take care how we made natural temper the rule of our conduct one way or the other; this, where it is followed, uſually leading men into an extreme either of mirth or melancholy.

3. To conclude; Let us aſpire to the *bleſſedneſs* mentioned in the text, by walking

[u] John ii. 1.—

ing in the way which that preſcribes us. Let us *mourn* that we may be *comforted.* The chriſtian religion is particularly adapted to promote this temper, both by its *doctrines*, and by the *example* of its great Author. By the light of the Goſpel, we diſcern the extreme danger which the ſouls of men are in, and the influence which the vices and errors of mankind have upon their everlaſting ſtate. And how can we but *mourn*, when we think of ſo many millions of ſouls ſporting upon the brink of deſtruction, and in danger of periſhing for ever? To which add the example of the Son of God, the greateſt perſon that ever lived upon earth, and the greateſt *mourner.* [w] *He was a man of ſorrows and acquainted with grief:* and were they not [x] *our ſorrows* that *he bore?* did he not weep for us, and how then can we refuſe weeping for ourſelves, and for our fellow-creatures, whoſe happineſs we ought to tender as our own, in imitation of that divine example which the Son of God has left us? Let us renounce the thoughts of a life of ſenſual eaſe and pleaſure, and maintain a *wiſe ſobriety of ſpirit* and ſuch a mixture of *religious ſadneſs* and *thoughtfulneſs*

[w] Iſa. liii. 3. [x] Ver. 4.

neſs as agrees with the preſent degeneracy of mankind, and the ſins and infelicities of this mortal life: and then, as we ſhall have pleaſures and ſatisfactions now which the world knows nothing of, ſo we ſhall at laſt enjoy a happineſs which is not allayed with the leaſt mixture of ſorrow.

SER-

SERMON XIV.

The character and bleſſedneſs of the meek explained.

MATTH. v. 5.

Bleſſed are the meek, for they ſhall inherit the earth.

THIS is another part of the chriſtian temper, and a very amiable one too, equally an ornament to the profeſſor of the Goſpel, and to the Goſpel profeſſed by him. None can ſpeak evil of it but thoſe who have as little liking to the *reality* of all other virtues, what ever value they may ſeem to have for the *appearance* of ſome of them. It is impoſſible that a true judge of inward ſubſtantial goodneſs, ſhould think meanly of this excellent quality.

THERE

THERE is a *meekneſs*, which is no more than a natural accompliſhment, and ſweetneſs of temper which ſome men bring into the world with them; who, without taking any pains for it, are ſoft, and courteous, and obliging in their deportment towards all men; it muſt be ſomething very extraordinary to ruffle their minds, and put them out of humour: this muſt be owned to be a very valuable gift of nature, and happy qualification for ſociety, rendering the poſſeſſor eaſy to himſelf, and agreeable to all about him. But, after all, there is properly no *virtue* in it, and therefore no *praiſe* belonging to it; tho' one cannot but love the temper, yet we never reckon it a part of a man's *merit* as far as it is *purely natural.* Nature may have been kinder in this reſpect to one who is very *vicious*, than to another of *eminent virtue*; to a *heathen* who lives in contradiction to the light of nature, than to a *chriſtian* who walks according to the light of the Goſpel.

THERE is a *meekneſs* of a ſtill higher kind than this, which yet does not come up to the meaning of the Text, the product of *civil prudence.* The conſiderations it flows from relate only to this preſent life, the pleaſure and tranquility of which are beſt conſulted by a meek and quiet behaviour. 'Tis from ſuch reflections that ſome men ſtudy to

to be quiet, and are upon their guard againſt all thoſe things which may diſcompoſe their ſpirits, and make them act ſo as to incur the contempt or hatred of others. They are willing to live in ſome degree of reputation, to be upon good terms with the world; they would have their company courted; and, in carrying on their buſineſs, would have as few to thwart, and as many to favour and befriend them as they can: upon ſuch principles as theſe they govern their tempers, carry it ſmoothly and obſequiouſly to thoſe they converſe with, put up many affronts, and aim to gain upon all by their good humour. We may commend theſe men as our [a] Lord did the *unjuſt ſteward*, they act wiſely as far as their views go, and take the right way to arrive at their end, the gain or pleaſure of this world, the kindneſs and good word of their fellow-creatures; this bounds their deſires. *Duty* they have little regard to, and as little to the teſtimony of a good conſcience, and the rewards of another life. Of ſuch perſons we may ſay, *verily they have their reward*, they generally have what they ſeek, and they ſhall have no more becauſe they don't ſeek it. 'Tis doing this *meekneſs* too much honour to call it a *moral virtue*; moral virtue is a very different thing,

[a] Luke xvi. 8.

thing, built upon a nobler foundation, and directed to a higher end. The foundation of *moral virtue*, is the *nature* which God has given us, and the *relations* we ſtand in to him and other beings; the *end* is the *higheſt happineſs* which we are capable of attaining in the practice of our duty, as far as it is diſcoverable by us: and whoever ſpeaks contemptibly of *moral virtue*, thus explained, ſhows himſelf not to have a right notion of *chriſtianity*, which is evidently deſigned to carry *morality* to its higheſt point of perfection.

HAVING ſaid this little of *meekneſs* as a *natural* and *civil* accompliſhment, I ſhall now conſider it according to that more excellent ſenſe in which the Text ſpeaks of it. And I ſhall,

I. DESCRIBE this virtue; and,
II. SHEW the bleſſedneſs of it.

I. I BEGIN with the deſcription of chriſtian *meekneſs*. 'Tis a prevailing *mildneſs* and *gentleneſs* of ſpirit, which influences a chriſtian's whole deportment, eſpecially under temptations to *anger*, and *malice*, and *revenge*; proceeding from *conſcience towards God*: ſo that we have here theſe *three* things which require our conſideration; the *quality* itſelf, the *effects* of it, and its *principal cauſe* or reaſon.

1. As

1. As to the *quality* itself, *meekneſs* denotes a *mildneſs* and *gentleneſs of ſpirit*. The abode of this, as indeed of every other virtue, is in the heart; there it rules, tames and civilizes the paſſions, and preſerves all things in peace. The main queſtion, when we are inquiring after *meekneſs*, is, what ſpirit a man is of? what is the temper which he cheriſhes in himſelf? for 'tis [b] *the meek and quiet ſpirit that is of ſo great price in the ſight of God*; the virtue or grace of *meekneſs*, not the art. The meek man labours after a *ſweetneſs* of diſpoſition, in oppoſition to *ſharpneſs* and *auſterity*; and after a *calm* diſpoſition, in oppoſition to one that is *reſtleſs* and *boiſterous*. There is much the ſame difference in the temper of the mind between the meek ſpirit, and one of a contrary character, as in the temper of the air when it is piercing cold or burning hot, or bluſtering and tempeſtuous, and when it is ſoft, and eaſy, and gentle: a perſon, eminent for this virtue, is properly his own maſter, poſſeſſes his ſoul in patience, and enjoys a tranquilty ſo much the more ſecure and undiſturbed, as it ariſes from the goodneſs of his principles, and the firmneſs of his reſolutions; not from an accidental coincidence of the circumſtances of his own life, or the actions of other men with his particular

[b] 1 Pet. iii. 4.

humour and inclination, which is a very uncertain thing.

2. THE *effects* of this happy temper, may be judged of from the influence it has upon the chriſtian's general deportment, and upon his mind and behaviour, when he meets with provocations to anger and paſſionate reſentment.

1. THE chriſtian's general deportment is very much influenced by the *meekneſs* of his ſpirit; his deportment in a *religious* and in a *civil* capacity; towards his *ſuperiors*, *inferiors*, and *equals*. In religion it is of great ſervice to keep men from being of an impoſing, a dogmatical, and diſputatious humour; ſtriving for victory more than for truth; not able to bear that others ſhould differ from them in opinion; impatient of hearing what they have to offer in behalf of their ſentiments; and eaſily diſpleaſed and offended in hearing the word of GOD, if there be any thing that does not ſuit their taſte and notions, or that ſeems to reprove or contradict any practice of theirs, though the reproof be never ſo juſt and true: *meekneſs*, I ſay, teaches men to act in a very different manner from this, according to thoſe paſſages of ſcripture; [c] *in meekneſs inſtructing thoſe that oppoſe themſelves, if God, per-*

[c] 2 Tim. ii. 25. [1 Pet. iii. 15. James i. 21. iii. 13.

peradventure, will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth: ready always to give an answer to every one that asketh them a reason of the hope that is in them with meekness and fear: receiving with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save their souls; and showing out of a good conversation their works with meekness of wisdom. The man of a *meek and quiet spirit* carries the same temper with him into his *civil* conduct, in which he is soft and gentle, [d] *shewing all meekness to all men.* His endeavour is to give no unnecessary offence to any; to which end he avoids all austerity of manners, and would willingly be an example of the greatest good-nature and complaisance, that is consistent with a strict adherence to the rules of virtue and religion. He is respectful to his *superiors,* [e] *rendering honour* and obedience *to whom they are due*; *pleases them in all things* where he can, with a good conscience, *not answering again*; not needlessly contradicting them, and representing their designs or actions as weak and foolish. His *inferiors* he treats with the greatest *humanity* and *condescension,* can bear with them, if they happen to fail sometimes in the punctilios of respect; he is a kind and gentle master to his servants, and how much soever he is above any, does not

[d] Titus iii. 2. [e] Rom. xiii. 7. Titus ii. 9.

love to put them in mind of it by an air of diſtance and greatneſs. He is not averſe to good advice offered in a proper manner, becauſe it comes from thoſe who are below him; regarding more *what* is propoſed than *who* propoſes it. With his *equals* he always converſes upon a foot of *equality*, rather aſſuming too little than too much, doing nothing to alienate their affections from him, but every thing to gain them that integrity will admit. When 'tis proper he can yield a conteſted point, and in *indifferent* matters adapt himſelf to their ſeveral tempers, in order to do them the more good. He is courteous and affable, and of an ingaging behaviour. Such is the influence, which *meekneſs*, according to the different degrees of it, has upon the chriſtian's *general* deportment. And,

2. THE good influence of it is ſtill more viſible in a time of trial, or when the chriſtian is under provocations to *anger*. Not that *meekneſs* is an enemy to *all anger*, for as the author of nature has given us none of our paſſions in vain, ſo this holds particularly true of *anger*, which is of uſe upon many occaſions, to repreſs and diſcountenance vice and folly, and to make us more warm and active in our oppoſition to them. Without ſome degrees of *anger*, our zeal in that which is good would ſometimes

times be too weak and languiſhing, we ſhould not be ſo forward, as we ought, to reprove and puniſh men for their faults; and ſhould find our courage apt to fail as danger approach'd, if *anger* againſt thoſe whom we apprehended to be engaged on a wrong ſide, did not help to counteract our fear. We read of the wiſe and innocent *Jeſus*, that [f] *he looked about upon his enemies with anger, being grieved for the hardneſs of their hearts*; and we need not deſire a better authority than this. The office of *meekneſs* therefore is not to extinguiſh the paſſion of *anger*, but to regulate it; and it is exceeding uſeful for this purpoſe, by preſerving us from cauſeleſs, from exceſſive, and from unrelenting *anger*.

1. THE *meeker* any man is, the leſs likely to be *angry without a cauſe*. And in general, there is *no cauſe* for *anger* where there is *no fault*; and in proportion, the leſs the fault, the leſs the cauſe. Every deliberate act of ſin is a juſt provocation to *anger*, eſpecially ſuch ſins as carry in them a more direct affront to the divine majeſty, and inſult upon religion. Next to theſe are notorious violations of the rules of common juſtice and charity, wilful injuries, and of very great conſequence, whether we ourſelves, or others are the ſufferers. Nay,

[f] Mark, iii. 5.

ſuch actions in which the ſinner hurts himſelf more directly than any one elſe, as by idleneſs, prodigality and exceſs, are not to be excluded. In ſhort, we do not ſin in being *angry*, as often as we are *angry* with men for ſinning; and yet we muſt not confine the cauſe or occaſion of *anger* to *ſin* neither, as if there was nothing elſe but a plain and direct tranſgreſſion of the law of God, that would juſtify our *anger*. It may be proper, and even neceſſary ſometimes to ſhew our diſpleaſure upon leſſer occaſions; as upon the account of a perſon's forgetting ſomething which he ought to have remembered, and would have remembered if he had applied himſelf to his buſineſs as he ſhould; doing miſchief for want of taking proper care, indecencies of behaviour, diſreſpectful and affronting words, or actions, and the like: but ſtill there muſt be ſomething of a fault, ſomething wilful in the perſon, as well as diſagreeable in the action, tho' it does not riſe ſo high as an immorality; for if that which offends us be done not only undeſignedly, but as it were unavoidably, if it be a mere accident, or the pure effect of ignorance and inadvertency, our *anger* in all ſuch caſes is without cauſe, and therefore unreaſonable and unjuſt.

2. *Meek-*

2. *Meekneſs* will make us watchful againſt exceſſive *anger*. And we are to remember that *anger* is exceſſive as often as it is diſproportioned to the cauſe; when a great flame is kindled by a ſmall matter, and our reſentments are carried beyond their due bounds. Does our *anger* unhinge, or diſcompoſe our ſpirits, put our ſouls into a very great hurry, ſo as to unfit us for the regular diſcharge of our duty, and to make us ſpeak or act after an unſeemly manner, by which means we render both our *anger* and ourſelves too contemptible? are we ſo far tranſported by the violence of our paſſions as to tranſgreſs the rules of prudence, and eſpecially of juſtice and charity? do we in the heighth of our paſſion expoſe religion, and break any of its commands? we may be ſure this is not according to the Apoſtle's direction, [g] *to be angry and not ſin. Meekneſs* would teach us better things than theſe, to moderate our reſentments, and to forbear all reviling language, and much more all revengeful actions. Indeed the law of retaliation is [h] *an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth*; but what ſaith our bleſſed Maſter? [i] *I ſay unto you that ye reſiſt not evil*; that is, we muſt not diſcover a proneneſs to revenge, or delight to render evil for evil;

[g] Epheſ. iv. 26. [h] Exod. xxi. 24. [i] Matt. v. 39.

but rather ſubmit to a leſſer evil, a tolerable inconvenience, than commit a greater in endeavouring to remedy it; we muſt rather chuſe to ſuffer evil than to do it; and even when we bring an offender to juſtice, we muſt act out of regard to the publick peace, or in hope of the perſon's amendment, not from a principle of hatred and revenge.

3. *Meekneſs* will not allow of an *anger* which is unrelenting; the paſſion muſt not continue too long, leſt it fret upon the mind, and rankle into bitterneſs and malice. *Anger* may paſs through the boſom of a wiſe man, but as [k] *Solomon* has obſerved, *reſteth* only *in the boſom of fools.* The heat and ferment of the paſſion ought to be ſoon over, according to that advice of an inſpired writer; [l] *Let not the ſun go down upon your wrath.* The ſtorm ought to be laid, and the fire quenched, that we may be cool as the evening, and in calmneſs and ſerenity of ſoul be able to offer up our devotions to heaven. That fire muſt not be ſpent in paſſion, which ſhould be conſecrated to the altar, and employ'd in conſuming our ſacrifice. The meek ſpirit, if mov'd, is ſoon compoſed, and returns to its uſual tranquility.—Theſe then are the effects of *meekneſs*, as it exerts its influence upon the chriſtian's *general* deportment, and eſpecially upon his temper

[k] Eccleſ. vii. 9. [l] Eph. iv. 26.

temper and behaviour, when he is under temptations to *anger*.

3. THE principal cauſe, or ſpring of this *mildneſs* and *gentleneſs* of ſpirit is *conſcience towards God*. It is this muſt denominate it a chriſtian grace, and the fruit of the Spirit. God ſpeaks to us partly by our own *reaſon* and *conſcience*, and partly in the *revelation* of his will to the world, by his Son Jeſus Chriſt; and we are to have an attentive regard to him in both theſe ways of making himſelf known to mankind. Does *reaſon* remonſtrate againſt immoderate *anger*, and preach patience and meekneſs to us? we are to obey the voice of *reaſon* as the *voice of God*. We muſt conſider conſcience as God's vicegerent, and our underſtanding as [m] *the candle of the Lord*, which he hath ſet up in us; and we muſt reverence the dictates of our own minds, becauſe God is really our monitor and inſtructor, tho' the knowledge we have of our duty comes from the right exerciſe of our own reaſoning faculties. But we are *taught of God* in a yet higher ſenſe, ſince he has *ſent his own Son* to teach us the way of righteouſneſs. It is God himſelf who has ſaid by the mouth of his Son, *bleſſed are the meek for they ſhall inherit the earth*, and calls us to the practice of *meekneſs*, and of all other virtues by his Apoſtles, whom

[m] Prov. xx. 27.

whom he has qualified and authorized for this purpoſe; ſo that in hearing them, we hear God who ſpeaks by them. Here then is the great principle of chriſtian *meekneſs*, which exalts its nature, and entitles it to the divine rewards; 'tis no other than a religious and devout regard to God, in whatever way he is pleaſed to diſcover his will to us, whether by *reaſon* or *revelation:* and as we are to practiſe *meekneſs* in obedience to the command of God, ſo likewiſe, becauſe herein we ſhall glorify him. An example, wherein the ſeveral virtues of the chriſtian life are conſpicuous, tends to promote the glory of God, and the credit of religion; both as it argues us to have right apprehenſions of God ourſelves, and is apt to produce the ſame honourable thoughts of him in others: and that true goodneſs has this tendency to advance the glory of the divine Being is one thing which ſhould recommend it to our choice, and will do ſo if our goodneſs be real. There is no good man but loves God ſincerely, and the love of God with a deſire of doing his will, and glorifying his name, includes a love of every thing that is good; as lovely and excellent in his eyes, and the way to render us acceptable to him, and qualified for the enjoyment of him as our chief good.

II. THE

II. THE bleſſedneſs, or reward of the *meek*, is next to be conſidered. *Bleſſed are the meek, for they ſhall inherit the earth.* This promiſe may reſpect the church of Chriſt in general, which is, or ought to be made up of *meek* perſons; or *particular* chriſtians, that is, thoſe of a *meek* ſpirit, in oppoſition to all others, even chriſtians themſelves who are of a different character.

1. LET us conſider this promiſe as made to the church of Chriſt in general, which is, or ought to be made up of *meek* perſons; for this is the true character of a diſciple of Chriſt, and by which, they who ſhould bear that name, were to be univerſally known and diſtinguiſhed: and of the followers of Chriſt under this character, or of the *meek*, it is here foretold by their Maſter that they ſhould *inherit the earth*; that is, overſpread the whole world. The promiſe made to *Abraham*, that [n] *in him all the families of the earth ſhould be bleſſed*, is by the Apoſtle *Paul*, expreſt in this manner, [o] *that he ſhould be heir of the world.* The decree concerning the *kingdom* of the *Meſſiah* runs in the ſame ſtyle, [p] *aſk of me and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermoſt parts of the earth for thy poſſeſſion.* And in the 54th chapter of

[n] Gen. xii. 3. [o] Rom. iv. 13. [p] Pſal. ii. 8.

of the prophecy of *Iſaiah*, ver. 3, the church is comforted with the proſpect of a large increaſe, which ſhe ſhould receive in the times of the goſpel; *thy ſeed ſhall inherit the Gentiles.* The alluſion in all theſe paſſages ſeems to be to the land of *Canaan*, which was given for an inheritance to *Abraham*'s carnal ſeed, this was a very ſmall and ſcanty inheritance in compariſon of that which his ſpiritual ſeed (the *Meſſiah*, who was emphatically the ſeed of *Abraham*) and all thoſe who imitated the faith of this good man, (who are likewiſe ſtiled his ſeed) are encouraged to expect when the kingdom of the *Meſſiah* ſhould be eſtabliſhed. Then the followers of Chriſt, the *meek* of the earth were to have the world, not a ſingle country, as the land of *Canaan*, but all nations, for their poſſeſſion. A great part of which promiſe was fulfilled within a few years after the aſcenſion of Chriſt to heaven, during which period the goſpel made a moſt amazing progreſs, people of all nations and languages becoming obedient to it, and after two or three centuries, kings and emperors themſelves. And how was it that the diſciples of a crucified Saviour extended their conqueſts ſo far, and in ſo ſwift a manner? not by the *ſword*, as the *Iſraelites* won the poſſeſſion of *Canaan* their inheritance; but by their *meekneſs* and *patience*, and other virtues, in concurrence with the *miracles* which they

they were inabled to work in confirmation of the chriſtian faith. They overcame evil with good, extinguiſhed the rage of their perſecutors by their own blood; and armed with nothing but truth and innocence, and the marks of the divine approbation, reduc'd one country after another to the obedience of the faith, much after the ſame manner as the light of heaven travels from eaſt to weſt, and triumphs over the darkneſs without noiſe or violence. And when ever the happy time comes for the enlargement of Chriſt's kingdom, and much more for the univerſal eſtabliſhment of it, in and over all the kingdoms of the world, it will not be done *by might or by power*, not in ſuch a manner as the chriſtians, ſome ages ago, recovered part of the holy land out of the hands of the infidels by armed multitudes; an attempt, which as it coſt the lives of many hundred thouſands, ſo met with little ſucceſs, and that of very ſhort continuance; this part of the world returning in no long time under its old maſters: no, the work will not be accompliſhed in this way, but as it was begun at firſt by the *ſpirit of the Lord*, and particularly by a *ſpirit of meekneſs and gentleneſs*. Could we but once ſee the virtues of the chriſtian religion generally prevail in the chriſtian world, there might be ſome ground to hope that with thoſe weapons they would not only

only regain what they formerly poſſeſt, but peaceably enjoy the reſt of their inheritance. The promiſes I have mentioned, together with the natural tendency of this ſpirit to promote true religion, ſhould encourage us in our endeavours thus to ſpread it, and prevent our being diſheartned by oppreſſions and perſecutions; being aſſured that the cauſe of truth which has once ſo remarkably triumph'd over theſe, ſhall again triumph; and being aſſur'd alſo from the prophecies of the *Revelations*, that the time for the univerſal prevalency and triumph of pure chriſtianity is not far off.

2. THIS promiſe may be conſidered as made to *particular* chriſtians, that is, to the *meek* amongſt them, in oppoſition to all others, even chriſtians themſelves, who are of a different character. The words are borrowed from *Pſal.* xxxvii. 11. *The meek ſhall inherit the earth.* Well therefore might it be ſaid of thoſe who belong to Chriſt, *all things are theirs*, ſince theirs is the *kingdom of heaven*, and theirs the *inheritance of the earth*; under which two are comprehended preſent and future, temporal, ſpiritual, and eternal bleſſings. Not that good men ſhall always have the largeſt ſhare of earthly things; this might really be a diſadvantage to them; but they ſhall have the ſureſt title to that portion which their heavenly Father

ſees

ſees fit to allot them, and the moſt certain poſſeſſion of it; holding it by the immutable promiſe and covenant of God, and under the watchful care and powerful protection of his wiſe and gracious Providence. As no one can pluck the *meek* themſelves out of the hand of God, ſo nor what God has given them to poſſeſs out of theirs. Whatſoever they enjoy not, or having once enjoyed, are deprived of again, does not come under that title of *food convenient for them*, which they ſhall never want. What is properly and ſtrictly their allotted portion, ſhall be better to them than land of inheritance.

AGAIN, the *meek* ſhall quietly inherit their part of the earth, be it more or leſs. So it follows in the *Pſalm* out of which theſe words are taken; *the meek ſhall inherit the earth, and ſhall delight themſelves in the abundance of peace.* [q] *Who is he that will harm you*, ſaith the Apoſtle *Peter*, *if ye be followers of that which is good*? A very great and undiſſembled virtue is, generally, the beſt defence both of a man's perſon and poſſeſſions; this holds remarkably true of thoſe whoſe *meekneſs* and *gentleneſs* are remarkable: it is thought as diſhonourable to ſet upon ſuch, as for a man that is armed to abuſe another who has nothing to defend him. As it was promiſed to the *Iſraelites*,

[r] *That*

[q] 1 Pet. iii. 13.

[r] *That none ſhould deſire their land, when they went up to appear before the Lord their God at the place which he had choſen*; ſo, for the greater part, it may be ſaid in the preſent caſe, that no one will have a deſire to diſturb thoſe of a mild and gentle diſpoſition in the poſſeſſion of what they have, and are contented with, not invading the rights of others. Who, but a man of the vileſt character himſelf, could delight to give trouble to one, who was univerſally known to have an averſion to all ſtrife and contention with any perſon whatſoever? not but that the greateſt good-nature, and moſt winning *meekneſs*, is ſometimes abus'd; but then 'tis, as I ſaid, by ſome of the worſt of men, and ordinarily they have better uſage even from the hands of thoſe very men than others have.

AGAIN, the *meek*, with their external enjoyments, have moſt comfort and peace within. To them, in an eminent manner, may be applied that obſervation of the *wiſe* man; [t] *Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treaſure and trouble therewith.* He never wants a feaſt who is of a *meek* and *quiet* ſpirit; he eats his meat in quietneſs, he has no ſuch mutiny in his boſom as diſtracts the wicked man, and embitters to him his ſweeteſt enjoyments: together

[r] Exod. xxxiv. 24. [t] Prov. xv. 16.

ther with peace of conſcience, there is peace between his reaſon and his paſſions; and beſides this tranquility which naturally ſprings from the ſtate of his own ſoul, there is the ſatisfaction which God produces in teſtimony of his approbation; for ſince, as we are told, [t] *The ornament of a meek ſpirit is in the ſight of God of great price*, we cannot imagine, that what he prizes ſo highly, he will not, in ſome degree, reward even now, by inward peace and pleaſure.

FINALLY, the *meek*, unleſs God in his wiſdom ſees reaſons for the contrary, ſhall *live longer* to inherit the earth, than ordinarily they would do if they were of an oppoſite temper. In this manner inheriting the earth, is oppos'd to a perſon's being ſwept away from it by death, in the thirty-ſeventh Pſalm before quoted, ver. 9—11. *Evil doers ſhall be cut off, but thoſe that wait upon the Lord they ſhall inherit the earth. Yet a little while, and the wicked ſhall not be; yea, thou ſhalt diligently conſider his place, and it ſhall not be; but the meek ſhall inherit the earth, and ſhall delight himſelf in the abundance of peace.* 'Tis true, ſuch promiſes as theſe had their chief reference to the times of the *Law*, when length of days was eſteemed a greater bleſſing and mark of the divine favour, than it can be to thoſe who

[t] 1 Pet. iii. 4.

have the cleareſt diſcoveries of life and immortality: but, however, they have not loſt all their meaning now; there are many virtues which have a natural tendency to prolong the lives of men, while the contrary vices as viſibly tend to ſhorten them. It is manifeſt that *meekneſs*, in a particular manner, has this friendly influence upon health and long life, not only by keeping men out of thoſe quarrels which the ſons of violence are continually ingag'd in, and by which life itſelf is often made a ſacrifice to paſſion; but by preventing the ill effects which unbridled paſſions have upon the animal œconomy. *Meekneſs* ſweetens the blood, and other fluids of the body, and preſerves them in an eaſy regular motion; by which means, the body does not wear out ſo ſoon, as when the blood and ſpirits are every now and then put into a violent ferment, and the whole machine diſordered by paſſionate reſentments, eager deſires of revenge, vexation when it can't be accompliſhed, and remorſe and ſorrow when it is.—Let this ſuffice for the illuſtrating the *bleſſedneſs* promis'd to the *meek*, *They ſhall inherit the earth*.—The Application of this ſubject remains, which I ſhall reſerve for the next Diſcourſe.

SER-

SERMON XV.

An exhortation to meekneſs, and directions for attaining it.

MATTH. v. 5.

Bleſſed are the meek, for they ſhall inherit the earth.

IN the preceding Diſcourſe I have

I. DISTINCTLY deſcrib'd this *meekneſs* as a *chriſtian virtue*, and ſhewn it to be a prevailing *mildneſs* and *gentleneſs* of ſpirit which influences a chriſtian's *whole* deportment, eſpecially under temptations to *anger*, and *malice*, and *revenge*, and reſtrains him from all *cauſeleſs*, *exceſſive*, and *unrelenting* anger, principally by *conſcience towards God*. I have alſo

II. ENDEAVOURED to recommend it, by ſhowing the *bleſſedneſs* promis'd to it in the text; *Bleſſed are the meek for they ſhall inherit the earth.* This promiſe I told you might be underſtood, either as made to all chriſtians in general, to the church of Chriſt, of whoſe genuine followers *meekneſs* is a diſtinguiſhing character, and then it denotes the ſucceſs and triumph of the chriſtian cauſe over violence and perſecution, in a great meaſure owing to the meekneſs and patient virtue of the diſciples of Jeſus; or as made to particular chriſtians eminent in this virtue, to whom it gives a ſure title to that portion of worldly goods which is beſt for them, and ſecures their enjoyment of it under the peculiar care of divine Providence, and whom it declares happy on account of the greater external quiet, and the inward peace and ſatisfaction by which their *meekneſs* improves the enjoyment of their inheritance, and their longer poſſeſſion of it; *meekneſs* naturally cheriſhing and preſerving that health and life, which fierce *anger* and violent reſentments wear away and ruin.—It remains that I make a proper Application of the truths delivered. And

1. FROM what has been ſaid, it appears no difficult matter to vindicate the chriſtian Law-

Law-giver in this particular precept of his religion, which has been repreſented as very unreaſonable by men who make their paſſions their rule, or govern themſelves by thoſe falſe maxims and notions of a brave and prudent behaviour with which the world is prepoſſeſt. In the account of theſe men, a *meek* temper is the ſame as a *mean* and *cowardly* one; and *not to reſent* all affronts and injuries is the way *never* to be without them: but the wiſdom of our Saviour, which was the wiſdom of God, judges otherwiſe, and ſo does the reaſon of mankind, when enlightened, and freed from the influence of partial and boiſterous paſſions. It muſt be confeſt, that ſome expreſſions of our Saviour concerning the practice of *meekneſs*, taken in the *letter*, and without any limitations, will not only have a very *ſtrange ſound*, but a very *abſurd meaning*, ſuch as theſe; [a] *I ſay unto you, reſiſt not evil; but whoſoever ſhall ſmite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other alſo. And if any man will ſue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak alſo. And whoſoever ſhall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.* For which reaſon, inſtead of underſtanding thoſe words in a *literal* and *unlimited* ſenſe, we ought to put a *moral* and *reſtrained* conſtruction upon them

[a] Matt. v. 39.—

them ſuitable to the nature of *Proverbial* ſayings. The meaning, in general, is no more than this, that we are carefully to avoid whatever would be an indication of an *angry* and *revengeful* ſpirit; and, on the contrary, to order all the parts of our behaviour ſo, as may teſtify to the whole world that *meekneſs* is our proper temper and character: and as this may be done without reſigning up all our rights to every invader, and bowing down the back that who will may ride over us, and laying our body as the ground, and as the ſtreet, to them that go over it; ſo we are allow'd to do every thing that *ſelf-preſervation* ſhall dictate, and is not contrary to the prevalency of a *meek* and *gentle ſpirit*. We ſhould be *ſlow to wrath*, and ſo manage our anger, when there is the moſt urgent occaſion for it, as to ſhow that we act from *reaſon*, and the principles of *juſtice* and *charity*, not from an *impatience* of temper, and the motives of *revenge*. And provided we obſerve this one rule, we ſhall come up to what our Maſter requires of us; and, by ſuch a mildneſs of temper make the beſt apology in the world for this command of our holy religion. For what can be more reaſonable and lovely, than from a true greatneſs, of mind, and a compaſſionate ſenſe of human follies and raſhneſs

neſs, to overlook affronts and leſſer injuries, rather than by violently attempting to right ourſelves to diſturb the peace of ſociety, inflame our own breaſts with tormenting paſſions, and multiply quarrels and injuries without end? A heathen * Poet gives his teſtimony to the true greatneſs of a *meek forgiving* ſpirit, and the meanneſs of the contrary, when he tells his friend,

——*quippe minuti*
Semper et infirmi eſt animi, exiguique voluptas,
Ultio——

Revenge is always the pleaſure of a *weak* and *little* mind.

2. LET us, by the grace of God, reſolve and endeavour to make this part of the chriſtian temper our own: as thoſe who are perſuaded it will be both our honour and our happineſs to be remarkable for a ſpirit of *meekneſs*, let us ſtudy to grow continually more and more perfect in this excellent virtue. Among a great number of rules that might be given for the government of our *anger*, I would recommend theſe few following.

1. As much as lies in you avoid all the occaſions and temptations to *ſinful anger*. Don't needleſly thruſt yourſelves into diſputes

* *Juvenal Sat.* 13.

putes and quarrels, nor chuſe to aſſociate with perſons of an angry and quarrelſome, or of an obſtinate and perverſe diſpoſition, for fear of being inſenſibly led away by their bad examples, or provok'd by their fooliſh and thwarting converſation and carriage. This is *Solomon*'s advice, [b] *Make no friendſhip with an angry man, and with a furious man thou ſhalt not go; leaſt thou learn his ways and get a ſnare to thy ſoul.* And when your relations and circumſtances in life, or the courſe of your buſineſs, ingage you to be in company with ſuch, ſeek, by all innocent methods, to preſerve them in good temper; remembring, that after they have loſt their temper, it will be more difficult for you to keep your own. And ſo in other caſes, obſerve what it was which gave the firſt occaſion to *anger*, and avoid it. Perhaps you ſaid or did ſomething which drew thoſe words or actions from others, that you could hardly bear; let this warn you to guard your language and behaviour another time with more care. You ſhould not make free with the *characters* of men, nor break *jeſts* upon their perſons or infirmities, but ſhould ſtudy how to make your converſation as inoffenſive as poſſible, not giving unneceſſary provocation; ſince one provocation will be likely to invite another, and

[b] Prov. xxii. 24, 5.

and what was only jeſt and merriment at firſt, to end in earneſt. There is one thing particularly, which is a frequent occaſion of the moſt fatal exceſſes of paſſion, and that is *intemperance*; which, at the ſame time that it increaſes the ſtrength of our paſſions, weakens our reaſon, by which we ſhould govern them; againſt which therefore, upon this account, as well as others, they who are liable to this ſin, ſhould be particularly watchful; eſpecially they who have found the dreadful effects of it, in its making them ſay and do thoſe things when *drunk*, for which they can hardly forgive themſelves when *ſober*.

2. If you would not be *angry* without a cauſe, or have your *anger* riſe to an undue height, know and conſider well the *nature* and *importance* of thoſe things which are the uſual occaſions and incentives to paſſion. Such knowledge as this would go a great way to prevent or moderate our *anger*; for, upon reflection, we ſhould find, that many of thoſe things which commonly produce the keeneſt reſentments, are too trifling to deſerve it; of which kind are thoſe, by which neither religion nor we ourſelves are really wrong'd, and which nothing but a fooliſh humour, or a falſe notion, renders ſo very offenſive to us. A wiſe man will be aſham'd to be in a very great

great paſſion about a thing, which he is inwardly convinc'd is ſcarce worth his notice: 'tis ſcarce to be imagin'd how much *ſenſeleſs anger* might be cut off this way. Mens paſſions riſe in proportion to the fancied cauſe or provocation, and that, commonly, is ſuch as will not bear examination. Did we form a right judgment of the things of this world, we ſhould not ſo often quarrel about them: a large ſoul, that can look with contempt on what is the object of the eſteem and love of vulgar minds, is not ſo liable to the incurſion of *violent anger*; children, in their play, eaſily fall out, and the reaſon is, that thro' the weakneſs of their underſtandings, and their inexperience of the world, having no apprehenſion of better things than the toys about which they amuſe themſelves, they magnify the value of theſe in their own imagination. Now, in reality, thoſe things which generally draw the affection and admiration of grown perſons, are but another kind of baubles. Men have their *play-things* as well as children. 'Tis therefore of great uſe to have our minds furniſhed with right notions, to weigh things in the balance of reaſon, and to view them by the light of ſcripture. We ſhould then have our minds ſo fill'd and poſſeſt with the proſpects of another world, as to be little affected with the

the evils and enjoyments of this; and, conſequently, to be ſubject to no great diſturbance and vexation when we were hindred and diſappointed in our purſuit of them.

3. WATCH againſt *pride*, the moſt univerſal ſource of *anger*, and that to which the moſt violent fits of it are to be charg'd. Indeed, whatever be the reigning inclination, whether pride, or avarice, or ſenſuality, we are too apt to be out of humour with every perſon and thing that croſſes it: but I believe it will be generally own'd, that *pride* is the worſt of all our depraved inclinations in this reſpect, the moſt nice and exceptious, and either meets or creates to itſelf the moſt frequent matter of offence. The proud man cannot bear the leaſt contradiction or neglect, imagines affronts and indignities where none were deſigned; expects that from others which no wiſe man would do, and what he himſelf is far from practiſing towards them. There is a very cloſe alliance between *humility* and *meekneſs*; for which reaſon, he that would be meek, had need begin with being humble. *Humility* would teach a man to do more to pleaſe others, and to demand leſs in order to his being pleas'd himſelf; not to magnify every indiſcretion or error in the conduct of another perſon, and to be more ſenſible of his own faults, and more ſevere

to

to them, which will hinder him from being quick to reſent every thing that is not done exactly as it ought to be. When ſhall you know an *humble* man given to *anger*; or a *proud* man who is not *paſſionate?* So that in mortifying your *pride*, you kill the root of *inordinate anger*. To a mind prepoſſeſt with pride, things appear quite otherwiſe than they do to one free from this prejudice; it being the nature of pride, like a falſe glaſs, to greaten ſome objects, and to leſſen others; to ſwell injuries and affronts to an enormous ſize, and to ſhrink benefits into nothing: upon this account, as well as others, we ſhould make it our buſineſs to ſubdue this naughty principle, to watch all its motions, and to counteract them; we cannot be greater friends to ourſelves than by ſuch a conduct, nor take a more effectual way to qualify ourſelves to be agreeable and uſeful members of ſociety, eſpecially a chriſtian one.

4. NOURISH and cultivate in yourſelves a *ſpirit of charity* and *good-will* towards all. [c] *Charity ſuffers long, and is kind.* It is the property of this virtue [d] *to cover a multitude* of miſtakes and failings, inſtead of being bitter againſt men upon the account of them. Humility, meekneſs, and charity, are faſt friends to one another. Charity is, in ſome reſpects,

[c] 1 Cor. xiii. 4. [d] 1 Pet. iv. 8.

reſpects, more helpful to meekneſs than humility itſelf; while humility is chiefly employ'd in counterworking our pride, and preventing the ill effects of that, charity has a greater poſitive influence, and by making us one, as it were, with the offending party, diſpoſes us to exerciſe greater forbearance and long ſuffering towards him. *If I love my neighbour as myſelf*, I ſhall neither be ſo prone to *anger* as I might otherwiſe be, nor in ſo much danger of exceeding the meaſures which I ought to ſet to my paſſion. [e] *Love thinketh no evil*; it does not meditate evil againſt others, nor lightly imagine they intend it againſt us. Where we entertain a hearty affection for another, we are willing to make all the allowances which the caſe will admit, to hear what can be ſaid in their excuſe, and are glad to find things prove better than they were at firſt apprehended. Such is the tendency of kind affections; and who is there but muſt be ſenſible, that were this method generally practis'd, *anger* would oftentimes have no place where it now rages. For a ſmall degree of charity would ſerve to cover many of thoſe faults which uſually appear ſo provoking; and having made a few reaſonable allowances for the ignorance or miſtakes of others, or their human frailties we ſhould find

[e] 1 Cor. xiii. 5.

find little remaining for our *anger* to work upon.

5. BE provided againſt the ſurprize of paſſion; and, to this end, count before you go abroad into the buſineſs and converſation of the world, that you may meet with many things which will try your temper, and reſolve, that whatever they are, they ſhall not rob you of the government of yourſelf. It is a great matter to be found upon our guard, and arm'd for the combat. We can hardly ſuppoſe, conſidering the diverſity of tempers with which we are to deal, and of accidents which every day brings forth, but ſome thing or other will occur to diſcompoſe us if we are not prepared for it: and if we conſider the nature of our circumſtances, and affairs, and make obſervations upon what is paſt, we may be able to conjecture pretty nearly at the temptations which fall in our way. By means of this foreſight, attended with a firm reſolution not to be carried away by our paſſions, our minds will not be ſo eaſily remov'd out of their place. Very often 'tis the unexpectedneſs of the thing which puts us into ſuch diſorder, as we are aſhamed of when we come to reflect ſoberly upon our behaviour; and, conſequently, we ſhould not have been ſo apt to fall into it, if we had thought well of

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it before hand. And ſurely, did we allow ourſelves to recollect ſometimes the many inconveniencies which ariſe from unbridled paſſion, the odd figure a man makes, the contempt to which he expoſes himſelf, and the many fooliſh and ſhameful things he ſays and does when the *angry fit* is upon him; did we duely conſider theſe things, and add the experience we have had of the evil effects of immoderate *anger* upon ourſelves, alike prejudicial to our virtue and repoſe, we ſhould not need many words to convince us of the neceſſity and wiſdom of this previous care and reſolution. We ſhould therefore ſay to ourſelves, "I fore-" ſee I ſhall be tempted, but am deter-" mined not to comply with the tempta-" tion. I will keep my mind in a rea-" dineſs, and my heart firm and ſteddy, " ſo that I may not be hurried away be-" fore I am aware. I will look upon " cauſeleſs or immoderate *anger* as an ene-" my for which I ought always to be pro-" vided; and as a man who knows him-" ſelf to be in the midſt of enemies will " not be ſecure, ſo neither will I. It ſhall " be my endeavour, by vigilance and reſo-" lution, to be prepared againſt temptations " of every kind, and particularly temp-" tations to *anger*; more eſpecially, if my " natural temper or circumſtances in the

" world

" world put me in more than ordinary dan-
" ger of it."

6. WHEN the ſtorm begins to riſe, preſently bethink yourſelves; check the paſſion in its infancy, and before it is grown too headſtrong to be manag'd. After you have given the reins to it, and let it chafe and heat itſelf by its career, it will not be ſo eaſy to ſtop it: wherefore you ſhould arreſt and examine it at firſt ſetting out, that if it cannot give a good account of itſelf, it may be timely ſuppreſs'd. How many think they can play with their paſſions as a ſkilful rider can with a horſe, turning him at pleaſure; but find themſelves miſerably miſtaken. The motions of *anger* are like that of a body down-hill, which increaſes every moment; or like fire, which if it has fewel to prey upon, the longer it continues, rages the more; or, according to *Solomon*'s compariſon, [f] *The beginning of ſtrife is as when one letteth out water, therefore leave off contention before it be meddled with.* We have not ſo much command of ourſelves as we fooliſhly imagine; and indeed if we do not command our tempers ſo far, as to keep ourſelves within bounds, when it may be more eaſily done, how can we think we ſhall do it after we have broken over

[f] Prov. xvii. 14.

over the boundaries which reaſon and religion have ſet us?

THOSE few *directions*, among many which might be mentioned, would, if carefully followed, be of great ſervice for the regulation of our *anger*. And that we may be induc'd to uſe theſe, and all other methods, particularly *prayer*, *reſolution*, and *vigilance*, for the governing our *anger*, and acquiring a meek and quiet ſpirit, I would offer a few conſiderations, beſides what have been already urged, by way of *motive*.

1. LET us be put in mind of our duty, and excited to the performance of it by the *meekneſs and gentleneſs* of Chriſt. Never was there ſuch a pattern of *meekneſs* as that perſon, who, in the text pronounces, *bleſſed are the meek, forthey ſhall inherit the earth:* never did any one poſſeſs this virtue in the ſame degree of perfection; never did any one beſides, meet with ſo many and ſo preſſing trials to exerciſe it; and never any one ſet ſuch an example under them as he did; ſo that it was no vain boaſt when he invited the world, ſaying, [g] *learn of me, who am meek and lowly in heart, and you ſhall find reſt to your ſouls.* From his firſt entrance on his publick miniſtry, to the laſt moment of his life, was one continued ex-

[g] Matt. xi. 29.

ercise of his *meekness* and *patience*. Not to mention the dulness of understanding, and *slowness of heart to believe* in his own disciples; the general ingratitude and stubbornness of the *Jews*, both rulers and people; their unbeleif, hardness of heart, and extreme degeneracy and wickedness; the contradiction of sinners, the opposition that was made against him, the gross misrepresentations of his life and doctrine, and, above all, that malice which was not to be satisfied but with his blood, and which insulted him even in his last sufferings; these, and many other things, which might be nam'd, being considered, with the manner in which he bore them, cannot but give us the highest notions of our Saviour's *meekness* and *long-suffering*, and at once make us blush to think we come so vastly short of him, and resolve, if possible, to resemble him more. It is with this argument that the Apostle *Peter* exhorts the christians of that time, [h] *when they did well, and suffered for it, to take it patiently, knowing that hereunto they were called; because Christ also had suffered for them, leaving them an example that they should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who when he was reviled, reviled not again;*

[h] 1 Pet. ii. 20—23.

again; *when he ſuffered, threatned not, but committed himſelf to him that judgeth righteouſly*, [i] *He was brought as a lamb to the ſlaughter, and as a ſheep before his ſhearers is dumb, ſo he opened not his mouth.* His laſt words were not like thoſe of [k] *Zechariah*, when the *Jews* ſlew him for telling them their faults, *the Lord look upon it and require it*; tho' even this was not dictated by *revenge*; [l] but *Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.* Bleſſed Jeſus, how can I anſwer it to God, to the world, to my own conſcience, if having ſuch an example of *meekneſs*, I refuſe to follow it!

2. CONSIDER the ſpecial obligations which, as perſons profeſſing the goſpel, we are under to the practice of *meekneſs*. Let it be granted, that this is difficult, and that there is little or no hope of ſucceeding in our own ſtrength; but have we not divine aſſiſtance offered us, [m] *grace ſufficient* to overcome ourſelves, and every temptation? and, in proportion to the aſſiſtance, we have, or may have, in the performance of our duty, and the attainment of any virtue, muſt not our obligations be to diſcharge that duty, and to acquire that virtue, and even to attain to an excellence in them?

[i] Iſa. liii. 7. [k] 2 Chron. xxiv. 22. [l] Luke xxiii. 34. [m] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

Let *heathens* complain of nature, and of the number and ſtrength of temptations, we know where to go for help againſt them. We do well indeed to be ſenſible of our own weakneſs, and the ſtrength of our enemies, but this muſt be in order to magnify the *grace* of God, and the efficacy of the goſpel, not to apologize for our ſloth and indulgence to corrupt inclinations. [n] The more is *given* us, the more is *required* of us. Let us apply with the conſtancy and fervour we ought to the throne of *grace*, and improve the *grace* we receive; and we ſhall find the government of our paſſions, and particularly of our *anger*, will become, by degrees, leſs difficult, and at length, in ſome meaſure, natural.—*Again*, the chriſtian religion inables us to paſs a *better judgment* upon the things of this world, which are the common incentives to immoderate paſſions. We uſually love and eſteem thoſe things more than we ſhould, and where theſe paſſions are firſt ingaged, *anger* is ſure to follow, as often as they meet with any oppoſition from other men. Now the goſpel gives us ſuch an account of theſe things, as, if believ'd and attended to, muſt beget in us a contempt for them, comparatively conſidered; and we ſhall not be likely to be very

[n] Luke xii. 48.

very ſoon, or very much in a paſſion, about things which ſtand low in our opinion. Having this advantage from our religion, for diſcerning the folly of *immoderate anger*, we are the more obliged to abſtain from it.—*Again*, chriſtianity makes the acquiſition of other virtues more eaſy, particularly of *humility* and *charity*, which will facilitate the practice of *meekneſs*, and thereby increaſes our obligations to it.—It propoſes the *beſt examples* to our imitation. That of the *Son of God* being ſo eminent, and of ſuch authority with all chriſtians, I conſidered it diſtinctly under the preceeding head. His Apoſtles and firſt Diſciples copied after him much more exactly than his followers have generally done ſince: they met with the worſt uſage from an ungrateful world, and this not only without, but contrary to all reaſon and juſtice; and how did they bear it? The Apoſtle *Paul* has told us; [o] *Being reviled we bleſs, being perſecuted we ſuffer it, being defam'd we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are as the off-ſcouring of all things to this day.*—The *future reward* which the *meek* may expect will be conſidered preſently. From all this it appears, that *chriſtians* are under *ſpecial obligations* to the practice of *meekneſs*.

[o] 1 Cor. iv. 12, 13.

3. CONSIDER if you do not govern your *anger*, that will govern you. One or other muſt command, reaſon or paſſion; and, I pray you, which of theſe is fitteſt to have the government? for which of them was it deſign'd by the Creator? which will make the beſt uſe of it, moſt for the credit and advantage of the man, moſt for the glory of God, and for the benefit of ſociety? theſe queſtions are ſoon anſwered. The mind, without reaſon and underſtanding would be like a man without his ſight; and is it a deſireable thing to be blind? no, certainly; every one eſteems ſight a very valuable bleſſing. But to what purpoſe have we ſight, if we do not uſe it? had we not as good be blind, as ſhut our eyes, and ſuffer our feet to carry us over a precipice? this is the caſe of the *angry* man, not uſing his reaſon and judgment to direct and rule his *anger*; his *anger* guides and manages him, hurries him into the moſt manifeſt inconveniences, which no one could otherwiſe than perceive whoſe eyes were open.

4. CONSIDER that by leaving your *anger* without due government, you deprive yourſelves of one good proof of your chriſtianity; which thoſe chriſtians have, in whom the principles of their holy religion,

gion, and the *grace* of God, work effectually to the bringing their paſſions into ſubjection to their reaſonable part. Is a man naturally prone to *anger?* without great care does he run into exceſſes of this kind. It muſt be a mighty ſatisfaction to ſuch a perſon, and an argument of his being more than a nominal chriſtian, when, from a deep conviction of his duty, a fear to offend God, and a deſire to pleaſe him, he gains ſome good maſtry over himſelf. This ſhows that *grace* has rectified *nature*. On the contrary, when a man indulges his paſſions, and then thinks to come off by charging all the blame upon *natural* temper; hath he not ſome reaſon to queſtion, that if he avoids other ſins, it is not ſo much out of regard to the authority of God, as for want of a ſtrong temptation to them? For if there was ſuch a temptation, why might he not comply with it, as he does with the temptations to *ſinful anger*; which, in his calm and ſober moments, he cannot but be ſenſible contradicts the rules of his profeſſion, as well as thoſe other ſins which he avoids?

5. LET us conſider what honour we ſhall bring to religion, by exhibiting in ourſelves a ſhining pattern of this moſt amiable virtue. Were religion allow'd to reform and

change our tempers, as it would do if its efficacy were not hindred, the world would be convinced that chriſtianity was not an idle name, but an active vigorous principle, and of the greateſt uſe to promote the peace and quiet of the world: and this, to every one who has a real love for religion, as every true chriſtian has, will be a conſideration of very great weight.

6. THINK how much this virtue will contribute to the repoſe of your minds; that in proportion to your *meekneſs* will be your *peace* and *tranquility* at preſent. Our paſſage over the narrow ſea of life is rough and ſtormy, or calm and pleaſant, much as we ourſelves make it. Let us be our own friends, and ſtudy our own true happineſs, and we may avoid the worſt part of that trouble which ſinks the value of the preſent life: we ſhall have a beginning of heaven upon earth, and which is more,

7. THIS heaven within will be a pledge and aſſurance of that heavenly reſt into which we ſhall be received after our trial is ended here below. Indeed, the only reward propos'd to the *meek* in the text, is, that *they ſhall inherit the earth*; but to all ſuch, earth is no more than a *nurſery* for heaven; and all the happineſs they enjoy here, but a very imperfect eſſay of that fulneſs

neſs of bliſs which is reſerved for them hereafter. Whatever promiſes beſides are made to good men, heaven is that which crowns all the reſt. Foraſmuch therefore as our reward at laſt will be perfect, let us make it our endeavour to be more perfect in this, and every other virtue, to which our chriſtian profeſſion obliges us.

SER-

SERMON XVI.

The character of thoſe who hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs explain'd.

MATTH. v. 6.

Bleſſed are they that do hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs, for they ſhall be filled.

IT were well for mankind if they as univerſally agreed in the true notion of happineſs, as they do in their deſire of it; and having all a right apprehenſion of thoſe things from which their felicity and contentment muſt flow, did ſeriouſly and ſteddily apply themſelves to the purſuit of them: no man then would be finally miſerable, ſince 'tis intirely owing to men's own falſe notions or wrong conduct, that they fall ſhort of their

their aim. Every one desires to be happy, but every one does not know or consider wherein his true happiness consists, nor use the only proper means for the attainment of it: few indeed do this, and for this and no other reason it is, that there are so few happy persons. Were they so convinc'd of the truth of our Saviour's assertion in the text as to have their thoughts, and inclinations, and endeavours directed to the object he here sets before them, not being wanting to themselves, God would not fail to crown them with the full enjoyment of their wishes.

IN my text there are *three* things which call for our consideration.

I. THE *object* propos'd to our desires, viz. *righteousness*.

II. THE *strength* and *fervour* which should accompany our desires after this *object*, express'd by *hungring and thirsting after it*. And

III. THE *blessedness* promised to those whose desires are thus directed, contained in these words, *for they shall be filled*.

I. LET us briefly consider the *object* of our desires here propos'd by our Saviour, viz. *righteousness*. This word is differently us'd in scripture. According to the most common

common acceptation of it in the *Old Teſtament*, it denotes the ſame as *real holineſs*, or *religion*, both in the heart and life: in this ſenſe, the righteous man is the ſame as the pious or good man. Thus [a] *Noah was righteous before God*; and ſo likewiſe were [b] *Zechariah and Elizabeth, walking in all the commandments of the Lord blameleſs.* And foraſmuch as *Chriſt* was now ſpeaking to *Jews*, who would naturally apprehend him to have no other meaning to his words than what they bore in the language of their own *ſcriptures*, we cannot doubt, that by *righteouſneſs* he meant that which is *inherent*, or the image of God upon the ſoul, comprehenſive of every grace and virtue: we have the more reaſon to conclude this to be his meaning, becauſe in this very chapter, ver. 20. the ſame word occurs again; and is evidently to be taken in this ſenſe. *I ſay unto you, except your righteouſneſs ſhall exceed the righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, ye ſhall in no caſe enter into the kingdom of heaven.* That is, "unleſs your "piety and goodneſs be of another kind "than theirs, it would never gain you the "favour of God." He ſaith *your righteouſneſs*, which implies that it muſt be *their own righteouſneſs*, ſo far as that they muſt be the *ſubjects* of it, and co-operate with the

[a] Geneſ. vi. 9. vii. 1. [b] Luke i. 6.

the *grace* of God in the production of it; not the *righteouſneſs of another* imputed to them. If their own *inherent righteouſneſs*, or *goodneſs*, did not ſurpaſs that of this hypocritical generation of men, no other *righteouſneſs*, tho' never ſo perfect, could procure them admiſſion into the kingdom of heaven. By *righteouſneſs* then, we are to underſtand the love and practice of every thing that is good; every thing that enters into the notion of a ſober, righteous, and godly life; a rectitude of ſoul including every virtuous and holy diſpoſition. As to the reaſon of the name, or why a holy temper and converſation ſhould be called *righteouſneſs*, not only that part of it which uſually paſſes under the name of *juſtice*, but all and every part of it, there are theſe *two* obvious reaſons to be given of it.

1. THE original foundation or ground of this, ſeems to be the abſolute fitneſs and excellence of theſe things, from whence ariſes an immediate obligation to practiſe them. 'Tis neceſſarily and unchangeably fit, that every intelligent Being ſhould act agreeably to his nature, and the relations he ſtands in to other Beings: he owes it to his own nature, and to the nature and reaſon of things, to act after this manner; inſomuch, that if he acts otherwiſe, he muſt go againſt all reaſon

reaſon and order, violate the law in his own mind, and be ſelf-condemned; and what would this be, but a kind of *unrighteouſneſs?* Since wiſdom has a natural inherent *right* to preſcribe to every Being how he ſhall act; and, conſequently, whoever does that which wiſdom and reaſon tell him he ought not to do, or neglects doing what they tell him he ought to do, is unjuſt, in counteracting the orders of the underſtanding to which the ſupreme power naturally belongs: even the *holineſs* of God, which takes in all his moral attributes, his *juſtice*, *goodneſs*, *truth*, and *faithfulneſs*, is ſometimes expreſt in ſcripture by this term of *righteouſneſs*; ſo 'tis ſaid, [c] *the righteous Lord loveth righteouſneſs*; where by the title of *righteous*, is meant the univerſal rectitude of the divine nature. And why is the word *righteous* made uſe of, but to ſignify that God, in every relation, whether as the Creator, or Governour, or Judge of the world, always does that which is moſt becoming himſelf, renders what is due to his own nature and perfections, which is the part of righteouſneſs or juſtice; and, with the greateſt reverence be it ſpoken, acts in that manner which his infinite *wiſdom* obliges him to do.

2. THE

[c] Pſal. xi. 7.

2. THE Term *righteouſneſs* is expreſſive of the whole duty of man upon another account, viz. that in every part of it we only fulfil the obligation we are under to obey God. The author of our Beings and fountain of all our happineſs, has an unqueſtionable right to require of us to lead a ſober, righteous, and godly life; in requiring all theſe things of us, under pain of his ſevereſt diſpleaſure, he does no more than he juſtly may; from whence it follows, that we cannot know the will of God, with relation to any part of our behaviour, and refuſe to do it, without the moſt heinous *injuſtice:* whatever the ſin be of which we are guilty, we are *unjuſt to God*; and on the other hand, [d] *when we have done all thoſe things which are commanded us*, muſt confeſs that *we are unprofitable ſervants*; inaſmuch as *we have done but what was our duty to do.* In reſpect of God, we can never riſe above *ſtrict juſtice*; never perform a work of *ſupererogation*; *all* that we can do is a *debt* to him.

THIS little may ſuffice to give us a general notion of that *righteouſneſs* which is here propos'd to our deſires and purſuits, together with the *reaſons* of the name. By *righteouſneſs*, is denoted *univerſal holineſs* of heart and life; ſtil'd *righteouſneſs*, becauſe it

[d] Luke xvii. 10.

it is no more than we are in juſtice oblig'd to, both in regard to the nature and reaſon of things, and the obedience we owe to the commands of God.

II. LET us conſider the *ſtrength and fervour* which ſhould accompany our deſires after *righteouſneſs*, expreſt by *hungring and thirſting after it*.—Hunger and thirſt are bodily appetites, or appetites of the ſoul, only as united to the body. The body ſtands in need of meat and drink for its nouriſhment and ſupport; and that we might not either inadvertently or wilfully neglect to take what is neceſſary to theſe ends, the wiſe author of our nature has given us theſe two appetites of hunger and thirſt which prompt us to ſeek after food convenient for us, and will not ſuffer us to be eaſy and contented without it; from hence theſe words are transfer'd to ſignify ſuch *deſires* of the mind as are ſtrong and vehement, and not to be ſatisfied but with the enjoyment of their proper objects. It may be of uſe to explain, in ſome particulars, what is imported in this *hungring and thirſting after righteouſneſs*.

1. IT implies a knowledge and conviction of the great *deſireableneſs* of the thing after which we *hunger* and *thirſt*—*Ignoti nulla cupido*.—What is *unknown*, is, for that reaſon,

reaſon, *undeſired*; altogether undeſired, if wholly unknown; and but little deſired, if we know or imagine little in it that is deſireable. Such a knowledge and conviction is the more neceſſary in the preſent caſe, to be inſtead of thoſe painful ſenſations by which we are admoniſhed of the want of meat and drink for the body. Would the body ſuffer by too long an abſtinence from food, and all its vital powers fail after ſome time? To prevent this inconvenience, the body, unleſs it be under ſome preternatural diſorder, feels ſuch a pain and uneaſineſs in this abſtinence, as makes us ſenſible, whether we will or no, that nature has not all which it requires; and after a little experience of the fitneſs of meats and drinks, to remove theſe painful ſenſations, we are not only powerfully allured by the preſence of theſe things, but mov'd to ſeek after them when they are abſent: but the wants of the ſoul do not immediately produce any ſuch preſſing uneaſineſs; men can want what is needful for their better part, and hardly perceive it; nay, ſometimes, are exceeding poſitive [e] *that they have need of nothing*; the reaſon of this is, that we are, at preſent, upon our trial for eternity, and therefore to the divine wiſdom it ſeems meet and proper, that the care of our ſouls ſhould not, like

[e] Revel. iii. 17.

the preſervation of our bodies, be a thing we cannot well help, but the effect of ſerious conſideration: *virtue* is to be our *choice*, not our *fate*. Were we obliged to look after our ſouls by a kind of *inſtinct*, which is the caſe with regard to our bodies, what room would there be for freedom and deliberation in the purſuit of the chief good? *Righteouſneſs* is one of the *neceſſaries* of the ſoul, and yet will not be purſued by us, if we do not know and conſider it to be ſo. In order therefore to *hunger and thirſt after it*, 'tis requiſite, that we ſhould have a thorough lively conviction of its being the moſt deſireable thing in the world for a reaſonable immortal ſpirit, upon theſe *three* accounts; as it's *Life*, it's *Perfection*, and it's *Happineſs*.

1. 'TIS neceſſary that we apprehend *righteouſneſs* to be the *life* of the ſoul, and therefore deſire it; it's *life* as a *moral* agent, tho' not as a *natural*. It is of the very nature of a ſoul to be a percipient or thinking Being, as well as indiviſible; it cannot die as the body does, by a diſſolution of it's parts, becauſe it is one ſingle uncompounded thing; nor, as it is probable, can it die by being depriv'd of its power of thinking; at leaſt, we have no ground to ſuppoſe that it can ever die in this ſenſe: it will always have a principle of thought and intelligence,

ligence, by which it will have ſome knowledge of itſelf and ſome acquaintance with other things; and a principle of election or choice, by which it will embrace ſome things and flie from others. But if theſe active principles are not employ'd about their proper objects, if there be no tendency in the ſoul towards moral and ſpiritual good, if it is void of all thoſe divine qualities which conſtitute the image of God, we may regard it in this ſenſe as a *dead* thing. Then does the ſoul live indeed, when it lives to God and for God; when God actuates the ſoul with his *grace*, and the ſoul by contemplation and love turns itſelf towards God; when it lives the life of God, lives to ſome valuable purpoſe, anſwers the great end of its creation, loves what is good, and hates what is evil; this is the proper life of the ſoul, as a *moral* agent; a life worthy of it, the life that was originally inſpir'd into it, and to which it will be finally reſtored, unleſs it chuſes a ſtate of death. And what is it but *righteouſneſs* which conſtitutes this life? for *righteouſneſs*, as I explained it before, is a combination or union of all holy and virtuous diſpoſitions. This, therefore, is the *life of God in the ſoul of man*; ſo we muſt apprehend it, that we may *hunger and thirſt* after it. *Righteouſneſs* is life, the nobleſt kind of life; and if all

life be deſirable, except counterballanc'd by miſery, this much more. Who can chuſe but aſpire to this life, that diſcerns the excellency of it? Or who, that in ſome degree diſcerns not its excellence, can with a due fervour of ſpirit aſpire to it?

2. THERE muſt be a conviction that *righteouſneſs* is deſireable, as it is the *perfection* of a reaſonable nature. This carries the idea ſomewhat higher. The perfection of *righteouſneſs* is the perfection of the ſpiritual life, and the ſoul is more or leſs perfect in the ſame proportion as it is more or leſs holy. There is more of real excellence and perfection in the *moral* endowments of the mind, than in the *intellectual*; in a *will* determined by the rules of eternal *righteouſneſs*, than in the higheſt degree of merely *ſpeculative underſtanding*. A ſaint of the loweſt form is a more perfect Being in this ſenſe, than the moſt knowing and ſagacious among the *fallen angels*; bearing a nearer reſemblance to the everbleſs'd God in that holineſs which is the glory of his nature. Indeed, all other excellence is *relative* to that which is *moral*; inſomuch, that if we could ſupppoſe ſuch a thing as an evil principle, or independent Being of great power and knowledge but without goodneſs and holineſs; the power and knowledge of ſuch a Being, let them be

be never ſo great, would have nothing in them valuable to the Being himſelf that poſſeſt them, or worthy of eſteem and veneration from other Beings. And further, as all other excellence and perfection is *relative* to holineſs, ſo holineſs promotes every other kind of perfection, and is, in the nature of things, and in the appointment of God, connected with it. The more complete any Being is in moral goodneſs, or *righteouſneſs*, the greater will his advance be in knowledge firſt or laſt. Holineſs has a natural tendency to brighten and improve the faculties of the mind, is the beſt qualification for the knowledge of the truth, and diſpoſes us to value it the more for the good influence it has upon practice. The love of the truth is implied in that quality of the ſoul which we call *righteouſneſs*; the heart of the righteous man is wide, tho' his underſtanding, by reaſon of ſome diſadvantages he at preſent labours under, be narrow; and where a man has largeneſs of heart as the ſand on the ſea ſhore, he ſhall, one time or other, have a largeneſs of mind in proportion. *Righteouſneſs* is the *perfection* of the ſoul in all its capacities, reſtores the order of the ſoul, aſſigns every faculty its place, purifies and exalts it, and prepares it for the enjoyment of its proper object: the conſequence of which is,

3. THAT *righteouſneſs* is not only the *life* and *perfection*, but alſo the *happineſs* of a reaſonable ſoul, and as ſuch deſirable. Perfection is in order to happineſs. That it may be perfectly happy, the ſoul muſt be perfectly holy, according to the capacity of its nature; and agreably to the degrees of its holineſs its happineſs is ſtill increaſing. There is a mighty ſatisfaction which immediately attends a right frame of mind, and conduct of life; [f] *the fruit of righteouſneſs is* preſent *peace*, as the final *effect of it is quietneſs and aſſurance for ever.* [g] *The ways of wiſdom*, or religion, *are ways of pleaſantneſs.* And then the pleaſure we receive from without, even from God himſelf, infinitely the moſt excellent of all objects, the immenſe ocean of good, depends almoſt intirely upon the preparation of the ſoul for it by *righteouſneſs* or goodneſs. As this earth is a ſtrange land, and their abode here a kind of baniſhment to holy ſouls, who are continually labouring after the conſummation of their wiſhes in the preſence and enjoyment of God; ſo would heaven be to unholy ſouls, were they admitted there: they could not be happy in heaven, becauſe not prepar'd for it; nay, having no reliſh for the pleaſures of that world, and finding nothing elſe to entertain them, they would

[f] Iſa. xxxii. 17. [g] Prov. iii. 17.

would be miſerable; and ſo they are at preſent; for tho' in this world they have a variety of things to divert their thoughts, to pleaſe their fancies, to engage their paſſions, and gratify their appetites; yet ſtill, for want of *righteouſneſs*, which is the natural ſtate of the mind, they are very far from being happy; their paſſions being let looſe, and ungoverned, create them a thouſand diſquietudes, beſides the fears and reproaches of a guilty accuſing conſcience. Of all theſe things, and of the deſirableneſs of *righteouſneſs* upon all theſe accounts, the man who *hungers and thirſts after righteouſneſs* has ſome conviction; and the clearer his apprehenſion, the firmer his belief, and the more frequent and intenſe his meditations of theſe things, the more urgent will his *hunger* and *thirſt after righteouſneſs* be.

2. THE conviction that *righteouſneſs* is deſirable, is followed with *fervent, efficacious, and laſting deſires* after it. While the ſoul owns the deſirableneſs of this divine accompliſhment, it is not kept from deſiring it by the influence of ſomething or other of an oppoſite nature, within or without it. At their firſt ſpringing up in the ſoul, theſe deſires may not be ſo ſtrong and vehement; but deſires there are which are ſtill waxing ſtronger and ſtronger; for where

the judgment is fully poſſeſs'd of the excellence of a thing, it is impoſſible but it ſhould be attended with a rational deſire after it: I ſay a rational deſire, becauſe, as the ſoul is capable of being acted upon in two different manners, by *ſenſible* objects which affect it, by the mediation of the body, and by *intellectual*, which influence it by the thoughts and apprehonſions it has of them; it is furniſhed with deſires ſuited to the nature of both theſe ſorts of objects; and, many times, the objects not well agreeing, the deſires of the ſoul carry it different ways: on this ſide, it is urged and ſollicited by its ſenſes and paſſions; on the other, by the judgment of the mind, which excites it to purſue after thoſe things which are its own proper and peculiar good; and not being able to reſiſt the conviction of their ſuperior excellence, as long as it attends to it, purſue after them it does, tho' pulled back by the body, and bodily appetites and pleaſures. And when the deſires after *righteouſneſs* have gained that degree of ſtrength, as to be properly expreſs'd by *hungring* and *thirſting*, there is then a ſenſible fervour in them; the ſoul then breaths and longs after the beloved object; witneſs the pious *Pſalmiſt*; [h] *As the hart panteth after water-brooks, ſo panteth my ſoul*

[h] Pſal. xlii. 1, 2.

ſoul after thee, O God! My ſoul thirſteth for God, for the living God; when ſhall I come and appear before God? This language is like that in which he expreſs'd himſelf when he was parch'd and faint with bodily thirſt; [i] *And David longed, and ſaid, O that one would give me to drink of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!* the water of which he knew was excellent, having often drank of that cooling ſpring. Some of this water being brought him by men who endangered their lives for it, he would not drink it, *but pour'd it out unto the Lord*; for whoſe favour and loving-kindneſs his *ſoul thirſted* more than his body did for that water: and to *thirſt after God* is the ſame thing as *thirſting for righteouſneſs.* "Let "others ſay, [k] *Who will ſhow us any good?* "tell us how we may get and enjoy the "world; *Lord, lift thou up the light of* "*thy countenance upon me!* O ſatisfy me "early with thy love, or my ſoul will not "be able to bear the impatience of its "own deſires! O ſhed abroad thy love in "my heart! I could wiſh I were all "love, for love would transform me to "thy likeneſs. I love thee, but not enough; "I would love thee more, even to the "utmoſt ſtretch of my capacity. In lov-"ing *righteouſneſs*, I know that I love thee, "ſince

[i] 2 Sam. xxiii. 15. [k] Pſal. iv. 6.

" ſince in thee I behold it in its greateſt " perfection. Here, O Lord, my wiſhes " center! I would have my ſoul repoſe " itſelf in thee, I would have it filled with " God, and *increaſe with all the increaſe* " *of God.* I would be the ſubject of his " *grace*, of the operations and influences " of his divine *Spirit* perfecting the life and " likeneſs of God in me; ſure then, to be " the object of his *love.* He cannot but " love his own likeneſs, and there can be " no better demonſtration of his kindneſs, " than his imparting this heavenly, this in- " valuable gift." The deſires of the ſoul, when they riſe ſo high as *hungring and thirſting*, are always efficacious; by which I mean, that they produce ſtrenuous and inceſſant indeavours to obtain the poſſeſſion of what we ſo earneſtly covet. Thoſe deſires muſt be very feeble, and very improperly deſcribed by *hungring and thirſting*, which have no viſible effect, or no effect which is conſiderable; which move the ſoul a little, as a gentle wind curls the waves of the ſea, but do not paſs into action. A man muſt love his eaſe exceeding well, who, when he is tormented with hunger and thirſt, had rather ſit ſtill and ſtarve, than ſtir out of his place to get what would appeaſe theſe craving appetites. A great part of the labour of mankind is for

for meat and drink; and, while others *labour for the meat that perisheth*, will not they who have a notion of another sort of meat, [1] *which endureth to life everlasting*, and hunger after it, labour for that? doubtless they will. This therefore must be taken into the idea of *hungring and thirsting after righteousness*, that such persons apply themselves to the use of all those means which promise them the accomplishment of their desires. They are wiser than to defeat their own desires by taking a contrary method, indulging to sloth and carelessness, doing nothing, or what is worse than nothing, ministring fewel to their lusts, and seeking the occasions of sin, instead of observing and embracing all the opportunities of promoting the welfare and prosperity of their souls. It is impossible a person who really *hungers and thirsts after righteousness* should act so inconsistent a part. One of this character will be intent upon mortifying every corrupt affection, avoiding every temptation, and practising every duty; he will watch and pray and strive, hearken to all the wise and friendly counsels of the word of God, and while he has the glorious end in view, will never matter the difficulty of the means or the roughness of the way: and, in this course, he

[1] John vi. 27.

he will perſevere, for thoſe deſires after *righteouſneſs* are ſtedfaſt and laſting. He does not make a few attempts, and then give over, begin well, but not patiently continue in well doing.—"My ſoul fol-" lows after thee, O Lord, ſometimes rea-" dy to faint thro' the weakneſs of the " fleſh, but holds on, renews her pious " reſolutions, and finds her ſtrength re-" new'd, gratefully acknowledging that all " her ſtrength is from thee, whoſe right " hand upholds her!"

3. As he who hungers and thirſts in a literal ſenſe is not to be ſatisfied with any thing elſe, inſtead of that meat and drink which alone can lay the rage of thoſe importunate appetites; in like manner the ſoul which *hungers and thirſts after righteouſneſs*, will reſt contented with nothing beſides that: a man ready to die with hunger or thirſt, would give thouſands of gold and ſilver for a few morſels of the coarſeſt food, or a cup of cold water, if he could not otherwiſe get them. There have been inſtances of this kind, of perſons who have purchas'd a little food, which, at another time, he would have loath'd, or a draught of water, with all that they were worth; and no unwiſe bargain. When [m] *Eſau*, returning from the field faint and weary, could not perſuade *Jacob*

[m] Gen. xxv. 29.—

Jacob to give him part of a meſs of pottage he was eating, unleſs he would ſell him his birthright, he reaſons after this manner; *Behold I am at the point to die, and what profit ſhall this birthright do me?* In this, no doubt, he acted too haſtily, for his extremity was not ſo great as he pretended, nor the right of *primogeniture* a thing ſo lightly to be parted with. But as to every thing in this world, wealth, power, grandure, if they were all to be put in the balance againſt the neceſſaries of life, what wiſe man would not reject them? If I muſt either quit theſe things, or periſh of hunger and thirſt; the matter needs not a moment's debate which of theſe I ſhall do; [n] *for what ſhall it profit a man to gain the whole world and loſe his life?* or *what*, having loſt his life, can a man *give in exchange for it*, that it may be reſtor'd to him again? Nay, could a man barely live without meat and drink, but ſo as to have theſe keen appetites of hunger and thirſt always gnawing him; he muſt be a fool who would chuſe ſuch a condition for the ſake of any temptation the world could offer him. So here, my ſoul *hungers and thirſts after righteouſneſs*; and what then will it avail me how proſperous I am in other reſpects, if I fall ſhort here? This being the ſuperior deſire, the ſatisfaction of all

[n] Matt. xvi. 26.

all my other deſires (could it be ſuppos'd) would not recompence for the want of ſatisfaction in this. [o] *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I can deſire beſides thee.* The man in the *fable*, who having a faculty granted him of turning every thing he touched into gold, could make no uſe of his food, becauſe, upon his touching it, it was immediately converted into that metal, quickly perceiv'd his folly in deſiring ſuch a gift, and begg'd of the God who beſtow'd it, that he would reſume it again. "Thus miſerable ſhould "I be in the midſt of the greateſt abund-"ance, if my deſires of reſembling and en-"joying God were never to be ſatisfied. "What tho' all other things were accord-"ing to my wiſhes, what tho' I had it in "my power to be every thing that I would, "except to be holy; and did no ſooner de-"ſire this or that, but I had it; alas, what "would all this ſignify, if I muſt live with-"out God in the world; if my ſoul muſt "continue deſtitute of the only thing that "can adorn, inrich, nouriſh, and ſatisfy it!" Such is the language, and ſuch the temper of a ſoul that is full of *hungrings and thirſtings after righteouſneſs*; nothing but *righteouſneſs* will content ſuch a ſoul; it had much rather have all its deſires and inclinations

[o] Pſal. lxxiii. 25.

tions reſpecting the body, and the world, denied than this; and if it comes to the trial, can part with all other things *for righteouſneſs ſake.*

THESE are the ſeveral particulars implied in *hungring and thirſting aften righteouſneſs, viz.* A conviction of the great deſirableneſs of it, attended with fervent, efficacious, and ſtedfaſt deſires after it; and theſe deſires ſuch, that nothing will content a man but the gratification of them. Every other enjoyment is deſpiſed in compariſon of this, to which all other things together will not make up an equivalent. This finiſhes the *Second* general head. It remains

III. THAT I repreſent the *bleſſedneſs* of perſons of this character; and this I ſhall do in the next Diſcourſe.

SER-

SERMON XVII.

The bleſſedneſs of thoſe who hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs.

MATTH. v. 6.

Bleſſed are they that do hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs, for they ſhall be filled.

IN the preceding Diſcourſe I took notice of *three* things in the Text worthy of our conſideration.

I. THE *object* propos'd to our deſires, *righteouſneſs*, which is the ſame with real univerſal holineſs and goodneſs, or religion both in the heart and life; ſtyl'd *righteouſneſs*, becauſe it is no more than we are in juſtice oblig'd to, both in regard to the nature and reaſon of things, and the obedience we owe to the commands of God.

II. THE

II. THE *ſtrength* and *fervour* which ſhould accompany our deſires after *righteouſneſs*, expreſs'd by *hungring and thirſting after it*. This implies a deep conviction of the great deſirableneſs of it, attended with fervent, efficacious, and ſtedfaſt deſires after it; and theſe deſires ſuch, that nothing will content a man but the gratification of them. Theſe *two* general heads I have conſidered, and I now proceed to the

III. THE *bleſſedneſs* of all thoſe whoſe fervent deſires are directed to this object. *Bleſſed are they that hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs, for they ſhall be filled*; they ſhall attain that *righteouſneſs* which they ſo earneſtly deſire, and in, and together with that, ſhall enjoy all the happineſs which is neceſſary to fill their biggeſt capacities.

1. THEY are *bleſſed*, becauſe they ſhall have what they deſire, certainly have it, and have it to the full. The event is as certain as the word and promiſe of God can make it. God has ſaid, or which amounts to the ſame, the Son of God, by authority from his Father, has ſaid, [a] *Aſk, and ye ſhall receive, ſeek, and ye ſhall find, knock, and it ſhall be opened to you.* And has God ſaid it, and ſhall it not be? But, it may be, I am not one of thoſe to whom

[a] Matt. vii. 7.

the promiſe is made.—The anſwer is obvious; God excepts none who are ſincere, and therefore none who are ſincere can have any reaſon to except themſelves; and the ſincerity of our deſires after the *grace* of God is, at preſent, taken for granted.—Is it the deſire of your ſouls to be made free from ſin, and reſtor'd to a participation of the divine holineſs? You cannot doubt that theſe deſires are approv'd by God, or that he will aſſiſt and crown them with ſucceſs. You ſhall want no helps neceſſary to this end, either external or internal. Hear what *Chriſt* ſays; [b] *I am the door of the ſheep, by me if any man enter in he ſhall be ſaved, and ſhall go in and out and find paſture. I am come that my ſheep may have life* (that is, all the means and proviſion for life) *and that they might have it more abundantly.* And he might well ſay ſo; and, upon that account, declare all thoſe to be *bleſſed who hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs, becauſe they ſhould be filled*; having, in the diſpenſation of the goſpel, liberally ſupplied us with every thing needful for our ſanctification at firſt, and our continual progreſs in holineſs; with the moſt excellent precepts, the moſt heavenly doctrines, the moſt ingaging motives, the moſt beneficial inſtitutions, and the moſt powerful aſſiſtances. Indeed, never any one who was unfeignedly

[b] John x. 9, 10.

edly desirous to know and do the will of God, under the light of nature, and much more under the law of *Moses*, was left by God in a helpless and hopeless condition. [c] *God is rich in mercy to all that call upon him*; and as he is pleased when he sees a soul struggling with the body of sin, swimming against the stream, and, as far as it knows its duty, willing to practise it; so he delights to favour the attempts and endeavours of such a soul, however weak at first. This is true of all men, whatever dispensations they live under, but, in a more peculiar manner, of those who have the gospel reveal'd to them; they enjoy such helps as none before them ever did, and if these helps do not prove effectual to any, it shall not be thro' any deficiency on God's part, but on their own. A dispensation of the *Spirit* shall accompany the outward dispensation of the *Word* to all those who improve the *Grace* which is given them. They who desire to be righteous and holy, in the manner before describ'd, shall be righteous and holy. [d] *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, yea come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price.* These are the words of the evangelical *Prophet*, like to which are those of our Saviour himself, [e] *when he stood and*

[c] Rom. x. 13. [d] Isai. lv. 1. [e] John. vii. 37.

cried, ſaying, if any man thirſt let him come unto me and drink. And foraſmuch as every thing muſt have a beginning, God will not expect from the ſoul, at its firſt ſetting out in the chriſtian race, that ſtrength of holy deſire which he does afterward. [f] *He will not break the bruiſed reed, nor quench the ſmoaking flax; will not deſpiſe the day of ſmall things*, but will give ſtrength to the weak who are ſenſible of their weakneſs, and continually improve his help. Let them follow the leadings of God's *Word* and *Spirit*, and their deſires after perfection ſhall be ſtill increaſing, and with them their perfection itſelf; they ſhall be filled with the fruits of *righteouſneſs* ſtill more and more in this life, and compleatly in the life to come. We may ſeek other things and not attain them, but [g] *God never ſaid to* any upright ſouls, *ſeek ye my face in vain.* It is very poſſible that our labour for other things may ſignify nothing, yea, 'tis very common, but, *that our labour ſhould be in vain in the Lord*, is utterly impoſſible; which is ſuch a motive to this labour as might reaſonably be expected ſhould prevail upon every one; eſpecially when it is added,

2. IN and together with the attainment of this *righteouſneſs*, they ſhall enjoy all that happineſs which is neceſſary to fill their moſt

[f] Matt. xii. 20. Zech. iv. 10. [g] Iſai. xlv. 19.

moſt enlarged capacities. [h] *He that cometh to me ſhall never hunger, and he that believeth on me ſhall never thirſt*; ſo ſpake the Son of God in the days of his fleſh; and what he ſaid on earth he fulfills in heaven. Tis true the promiſe is in ſome degree made good at preſent; they who have the beginnings of heaven in the holineſs of their tempers, have ſome foretaſts of its joys; but they are only prelibations and earneſts of that [i] *fulneſs of joy* which is *in the preſence of* God. And whence does that joy ariſe? there is no queſtion, immediately and chiefly from the enjoyment of God. But what is it to enjoy God, but to love him, and to be loved by him? and what is love to God, riſing to its higheſt perfection, but the perfection of holineſs? and what is it but this perfection of holineſs that renders us the objects of the perfect love of God? [k] *Then ſhall we be ſatisfied*, and not till then, *when we awake with his likeneſs*. In ſeeing God we ſhall be happy, becauſe [l] *when we ſee him as he is, we ſhall be like him.* We ſhall be like him in his everlaſting bleſſedneſs, becauſe we ſhall reſemble him in his unchangeable *righteouſneſs*: ſuch ſhall the final happineſs of the righteous be; they now *hunger and*

[h] John. vi. 35. [i] Pſal. xvi. 11. [k] Pſal. xvii. 15. [l] 1 John. iii. 2.

thirſt after the ſupreme good, they ſhall then [m] *hunger no more, neither ſhall they thirſt any more; becauſe they are before the throne of God, and ſerve him day and night in his temple; and he that ſitteth upon the throne ſhall dwell among them.* Having deſpis'd the treaſures of the world, and *laid up for themſelves treaſures in heaven*, they ſhall forever ſpend upon theſe treaſures, without being ever able to exhauſt them; here are *durable riches and righteouſneſs.* Their deſire of freedom from all ſin, and poſſeſſing the poſitive part of holineſs, being now accompliſhed, draws after it the accompliſhment of all their other deſires; of the deſire of happineſs in general, and of all thoſe particular deſires, the gratification of which muſt conſpire to render their felicity compleat. Thoſe bleſſed ſouls [n] *delight themſelves in the Lord, and he gives them the deſires of their hearts.* And now we may ſay all deſire is at a ſtand, they have all that heart can wiſh, and more than could once enter into their hearts to conceive; without all controverſy therefore, *bleſſed are they that hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs, ſince they ſhall be thus filled.*

I ſhall conclude with a proper Application of this Subject.

1. WHAT

[m] Rev. vii. 15, 16. [n] Pſal. xxxvii. 4.

1. WHAT has been ſaid will aſſiſt us in determining that queſtion, *Whether the deſire of grace be grace?* If the deſire be ſincere, the loweſt degrees of it ſhow a work of *grace* begun; and that I call *a ſincere deſire* which is founded in a right apprehenſion of the thing ſignified by the word *grace*, (as being the ſame with what our Saviour in the Text calls *righteouſneſs*) and productive of ſuitable reſolutions and endeavours. Here the happy change begins, and, in proportion to the ſtrength and efficacy of theſe deſires, advances forward; and when theſe deſires are become ſo ſtrong as to prevail over all our deſires, to command the ſoul, and give laws to all its purſuits, indulging or controuling them, juſt as they happen to be conſiſtent or otherwiſe with the hope of ſalvation, it may then be concluded, that the man is in *a ſtate of grace*, and to be numbered amongſt the righteous. The expreſſion of *hungring and thirſting after righteouſneſs*, cannot well denote any thing leſs than ſuch a prevalency of holy deſire: but where the deſires are ſo imperfect as not to be able to counter-act the corrupt principle, and make head againſt the temptations to which a man is expoſed in the courſe of his life, they are not ſufficient to denominate him at preſent

a thorough chriſtian; though, if they are carefully nouriſhed and improved, they will at laſt come to be of this kind. And much leſs can any one reaſonably build upon *a deſire of grace*, which is only indiſtinct and confuſed; when a man wiſhes that he was a true chriſtian, and a child of God, but does not reflect, that to become ſuch, he muſt be [n] *holy in all manner of converſation*; nay, perhaps, fancies he may be ſo by the *imputation* of another's righteouſneſs, without any of his own; this does not imply that the renovation of the ſoul is ſo much as begun.

2. How ſolicitous ſhould we be to know whether the *bleſſedneſs* in the Text belongs to us; that is, whether we *hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs:* this is not difficult to know; if we only conſider the explanation before given of this character, and try ourſelves by it, we need not to be at a loſs what to think of ourſelves. Are we thoroughly convinced of the exceeding deſireableneſs of this holy temper, that it is our *life*, the *perfection*, the *happineſs* of the ſoul? are our deſires actually carried out after it, and are they fervent, efficacious, and conſtant? and, finally, are we ready to ſacrifice the gratification of all our other deſires to the ſatisfaction of theſe? can we anſwer in the affir-

[n] 1 Pet. i. 15.

affirmative to these questions? and, surely, if we are impartial, we may be able to tell whether we can or no; we have then nothing else to do but to rejoice in the happiness of our condition, and, by the consideration hereof, to encourage ourselves to persevere as we have begun, not dispirited by all the difficulties and opposition we can meet with.— Let me add two or three *marks* more, which we shall do well to consider and attend unto, when we are examining ourselves.

1. IF we *hunger and thirst after righteousness*, we shall have a high value for all the duties and institutions of religion; by which, under the influences of the *Holy Spirit*, and in concurrence with our own unwearied endeavours, this divine temper is produced and carried on in our souls. If the divine life is but just begun in us, we shall, [o] *as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby*; and our desire to partake of the sacred nourishment, will dispose us, with all readiness, to embrace the opportunities we have of searching the holy scriptures, and meditating on the divine and important truths therein contained: we shall likewise readily attend where the word of God is preached, and

[o] 1 Pet. ii. 2.

[p] and *give* the greateſt *heed to what we hear, leaſt we ſhould let it ſlip.* As God has, in mercy to our ſouls, made it our duty to worſhip him in private and publick, and to give ourſelves to holy exerciſes; ſo we ſhall be ſenſible of his great goodneſs to us herein, thankfully acknowledge it, and wiſely improve it. External duties, ſeparately conſidered, are, indeed, of little value; but this is no objection againſt theſe duties, but againſt thoſe who fooliſhly ſeparate between the external performance, and the good effects which it is deſigned to have upon the mind; and when we conſider them in this view, we cannot prize them too highly. 'Tis true, the agency of the *Spirit* is a principal thing to be regarded; but ſince the *Spirit* ſeldom acts without the inſtrumentality of outward means, (we may ſay, never where theſe means are ſlighted and deſpiſed) it concerns us to make the beſt uſe of them we can; and, provided we do ſo, at the ſame time imploring the inward operations of the *Spirit of grace and holineſs*, and, uniting our own endeavours, we ſhall have reaſon to ſay of them, as *Chriſt* did of the words he had ſpoken to the *Jews*; that [q] *they are ſpirit and life.* From this approved tendency of the inſtrumental duties of religion, to advance and cheriſh a divine

[p] Heb. ii. 1. [q] John vi. 63.

divine temper in the ſoul, it may be inferred, that all ſuch as have little or no eſteem for theſe duties, have conſequently very little acquaintance with that *hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs*, of which the Text makes mention.

2. ANOTHER *mark* of our having theſe fervent deſires after *righteouſneſs* is, that our other deſires will be directed and moderated by theſe; ſo that the more we love God and goodneſs, Chriſt and heaven, the leſs we ſhall love the world, and the things of the world: for the capacities of the ſoul being limited, and the nature of the objects ſo very different, its affections cannot run with a full ſtream in both theſe channels at once; but as one fills, the other will empty. The alteration in this reſpect will be ſenſible. The heart of the covetous man, which thirſts after the riches of this world, is like a dry and parched deſart, to which the moſt plentiful ſhowers of rain ſignify little or nothing; ſince all that falls is immediately ſucked up, and, after a little time, it has the ſame appearance of drought as before; thus, how much ſoever riches increaſe, the deſires of the miſer remain unſatisfied. And the ſame may be ſaid of the voluptuous and ambitious, whoſe deſires are eagerly ſet upon the pleaſures or honours of the world. We may call ſuch deſires

deſires the fever of the ſoul; and what is there that will cure the ſoul of this feveriſh thirſt? nothing elſe will do it but its hungring and thirſting after things of an oppoſite nature, ſuch as the favour of God and his righteouſneſs. Where theſe nobler deſires are introduced, the others proportionably abate; inſomuch, that ſuppoſing the ſoul to be fill'd with earneſt deſires after ſpiritual perfection, and a ſpiritual felicity, in the room of an immoderate fondneſs for earthly things, will ſucceed an holy indifference to them; they will not only appear contemptible to the judgment of the mind, but the prevailing taſte which the ſoul now has for the pleaſures of devotion, will give it a ſort of diſreliſh for the ſatisfactions of ſenſe. Never, therefore, imagine, that you are in the number of thoſe *who hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs*, in caſe you feel the ties upon your hearts towards worldly objects to draw as ſtrong as ever.

3. IN conſequence of the former characteriſtic, we ſhall judge of our happineſs, not by our outward condition, but by the ſtate of our ſouls; being not only contented, but thankful if they proſper. If the world does not ſmile upon me, am I afflicted beyond meaſure? can I nor meet with loſſes and diſappointments, but I preſently

ſently conclude, that I am going to be utterly undone? do ſad thoughts croud in upon my mind on ſuch occaſions; and in the multitude of ſuch thoughts, will the comforts of God avail nothing to delight my ſoul? ah, what muſt I think of myſelf, if this be a true deſcription of my caſe? certainly, I am quite deſtitute of the truth of *grace*, or this new, this divine principle is exceeding feeble in me. Were my ſoul in a vigorous, healthy ſtate, active and zealous for God, and bleſs'd with the teſtimonies of his gracious preſence, ſtrongly tending upwards to the joys of eternity, and animated with the aſſurance of its being deſtined to this glorious lot; I ſhould not think theſe were things to diſtrub myſelf about, none of theſe things would then very much move me; how could they, when my ſoul was intent upon the purſuit of ſuch things as it eſteemed of infinitely greater importance to it? "No — my "God, the ſmiles of thy countenance, "thy *grace* purifying my ſoul, and thy "love cheriſhing and ſupporting it, will "make amends for the want of any out-"ward comfort whatſoever! I own, I "ſhould be perfectly unworthy of theſe high "privileges, and diſcover my ignorance of "their value, if I could once entertain a "thought, that any good man could be "miſerable.

" miſerable. Let me have the *honour that* " *cometh from God*, the *rejoicing* that at- " tends *the teſtimony of a good conſcience*, " and be *rich in good works*, and I ſhall " eſteem myſelf happy whatever elſe I " want or ſuffer. At worſt, my neceſſities " and ſufferings can but oppreſs and ſink " my body, my better part is ſafe, and " my title ſecured to the happineſs of the " next life." This is the *Second* inference, how ſolicitous ſhould we be to know whether the *bleſſedneſs* in the Text belongs to us; that is, whether we *hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs*; of which I have given *three* marks, that by them you might know yourſelves, beſides thoſe to be gathered from the *Second* general head.

3. WE ſhould diligently cultivate theſe holy deſires in our ſouls; and for this end, the following rules, among others, carefully obſerved, and faithfully practiſed, may be of great ſervice.

1. LET us [r] *crucify the fleſh with its affections and luſts*. Self-denial is one of the greateſt friends to a weak and declining virtue; 'tis like killing the weeds in a field or garden, which makes the wholeſome plants to flouriſh, and the good ſeed to ſpring up and bring forth the greater increaſe. A life of ſenſual indulgence, or ſuffering our hearts to run out after covetouſneſs, is not the

[r] Gal. v. 24.

the way to promote, but hinder the growth of our desires after *righteousness*. 'Tis true, we cannot, by an immediate power over our minds, disengage ourselves from sensual and worldly inclinations, but we can withdraw that which feeds them; if the inward affection be not under our command, the outward action is: we can chuse, the *grace* of God assisting us, whether we will gratify our corrupt passions, and do the things which they put us upon doing. Our sensual inclinations prompt us to a great many things, but cannot force us; let us, therefore, resolutely and constantly counter-act them: instead of abandoning ourselves to a life of fleshly ease on the one hand, or excessive toil and care on the other, let us live as becomes the followers of Jesus, and we shall find, that by little and little, the very desires of our hearts will be changed, and what was very great self-denial at first, will at last, be hardly any at all. God does not require us to do impossibilities; that we *hunger and thirst after righteousness* is what he requires; and though we cannot do this in an instant, and by an absolute empire over ourselves, yet we can order our conversation aright, by that *grace* which God is always ready to afford us; and the consequence of this will be, that God will subdue our irregular desires, and plant others

in

in their room, which will be continually reviving and eſtabliſhing by the influences of his *Holy Spirit*.

2. LET us practiſe frequent retirement from the world. The generality of chriſtians loſe themſelves in the world, and therefore 'tis no wonder they do not find God; they are hardly ever in their own company, hardly ever at leiſure to commune with their own hearts, or to converſe with divine and heavenly objects. Let us take a contrary method, often to retreat to our cloſets and into ourſelves, abſtract our minds from all earthly things, and, as it were, get above them into a higher region, from whence we may be able to view them with the indifference and impartiality of diſintereſted ſpectators, as if we were not inhabitants of the world, as ſhortly we ſhall not be; or if inhabitants for a little time, yet ſtrangers in it. When the mind was thus collected in itſelf, it would be able to form a ſounder judgment of things, and not find it ſo difficult a matter to conform its inclinations to the dictates of enlightned reaſon. Why do the inclinations of the ſoul lean ſo much towards the world and the body? one reaſon is, that it dwells as it were in the ſenſes, and ſeldom or never retires to enter into converſation with itſelf. Why are inviſible things ſo little regarded?

garded? but becauſe we ſo ſeldom withdraw from this viſible ſcene, and by meditation, place ourſelves in the midſt of things unſeen. It cannot be expreſſed how great advantage we ſhould reap from the obſervation of this rule: in retirement we ſhould unlearn the notions and the language we had learnt in the world, and learn to think and talk after quite another manner; for 'tis really in conformity to the world, its opinions and cuſtoms, that we go into wrong apprehenſions and a wrong taſte; from which of courſe we ſhould gradually free ourſelves by retirement and ſelf recollection.

3. IN retirement we ſhould accuſtom ourſelves much to devotional exerciſes, caſt ourſelves down in the preſence of God, ſtrive to elevate our minds to him, and earneſtly intreat him to have pity on us, to enlighten our darkneſs, and to help our weakneſs. Acts of repentance, and faith, and hope, and love, ſhould be often repeated. By thinking of the odious nature and deſtructive conſequences of ſin, how it weakneſs, enſlaves, and defiles the mind, how contrary to its felicity and perfection, and to all the obligations which God has laid upon us, we ſhould feel in our ſouls a growing hatred to it. The more we ſorrowed for it after a godly ſort, the more ſhame and confuſion it rais'd in our breaſts,

the more we ſhould deteſt it.— To repentance we ſhould add the exerciſe of faith towards God, and towards our Lord Jeſus Chriſt; faith in the preſence and perfections of God, his Providence and his promiſes, and in all the glorious truths and diſcoveries of the goſpel. Do I believe all theſe things? and is it poſſible if I know and conſider what I believe, that theſe truths ſhall not have a very powerful influence upon me, and beget another kind of temper, and other views and deſires than are to be found in the carnal and worldly? do I not hope to ſee God, and to be forever with Chriſt my Saviour and Lord? and will not this hope, frequently actuated by contemplation, actuate every grace and virtue and make me [f] *purifie my ſelf as God is pure?* That our hope in an inviſible God and of an inviſible felicity may be ſtrong and lively, it is highly requiſite that it ſhould be more explicit; and that it may be ſo, we had need in the ſilent receſſes of the mind think both on what we hope for, and the ground we have for our hope. By this means our hope would have a very conſiderable effect upon us, which would be yet farther increas'd by the acts and exerciſes of divine love. We ſhould be often awak'ning this holy paſſion. " O how I love thee thou " beſt

[f] 1 John. iii. 3.

" beſt of Beings! rather, how would I love " thee! when I reflect how amiable thou art, " how infinitely amiable, and what thou " haſt done to deſerve my love; how can " I think of thee and not love thee! how " run over in my mind thy numberleſs and " moſt wonderful benefits, and not be " irreſiſtibly drawn by theſe bands of love! " Or how can I love God, and not love " that holineſs which he himſelf ſo much " delights in! How can I love my Saviour, " and not have the moſt vehement de- " ſires to excel in that righteouſneſs which " will render me lovely in his ſight!" *Prayer* and *Praiſe* and *Thankſgiving* ſhould be our daily, and our moſt delightful employments. *Prayer* has enough to recommend it upon its own account to every pious mind, giving vent to thoſe deſires and affections, which being ſuppreſt and pent up in the ſoul would cauſe great uneaſineſs and diſquietude; whereas pouring them out in *Prayer* brings unſpeakable eaſe and pleaſure. But when the chriſtian conſiders the happy effects of it, how it exalts the mind, and ſtrengthens and improves every good diſpoſition, his eſteem for it is yet farther eſtabliſhed. With our *Prayers* we ſhould not forget to mingle *Praiſe* and *Thankſgiving*, bleſſing God for what he has already done in anſwer to our deſires; by

which means we ſhall be encouraged to go on in the way of our duty, not doubting that God will give more *grace* to thoſe who gratefully acknowledge and faithfully improve what they have received, and not fail to perfect the good work he has begun. When we are proſtrating our ſouls before God, we ſhould in a particular manner beg of him to grant us his *Holy Spirit* to renew us in the ſpirit of our minds more and more; and be afraid of every thing which would offend and grieve him.

4. LET us often reflect on the diſtinction between our ſouls and our bodies, and the great preheminence of the former above the latter; and let us labour to confirm ourſelves ſtill more in the perſuaſion of this, and to have a clearer and juſter apprehenſion of it. It muſt be owned the greater part of mankind do not live as if there were any ſuch diſtinction as this, or at leaſt as if they believed it; one would rather imagine by the intire bent of their purſuits, that they regarded the ſoul as no more than a finer part of the body, in whoſe fate its own will be involved, periſhing with it, never to exiſt more: but however men may live, or whatever they may believe, the nature of things is not changed by it; it will ſtill be true that the body is as much inferior to the ſoul, as a paſſive unconſcious

unconſcious ſubſtance is to one which acts and thinks. There muſt be ſuch Beings as Spirits, pure uncompounded ſubſtances, and of this nature the ſoul of man muſt be; it being impoſſible to account for the operations of a ſoul by the properties of matter. That they who have drown'd themſelves in ſenſual gratifications ſhould be averſe to the notion of ſuch immaterial ſubſtances, is not at all to be wondered at; becauſe acting as if they conſiſted intirely of fleſh and blood, they are willing to believe they are nothing elſe.—Let us, my Friends, conſider that ſuch excellent faculties and large capacities as we experience in ourſelves can never reſide in the body; and from hence let us raiſe our thoughts to another kind of Being, which tho' united to the body, is more worthy of our care. Did we believe and conſider this as we ought, that the ſoul is of a nobler nature than the body, and conſequently its intereſts and happineſs of infinitely greater importance, we ſhould not be apt to [t] *take thought for the body, ſaying, what ſhall we eat? or what ſhall we drink? or wherewithal ſhall we be cloathed?* and in the mean while be unconcerned about our ſouls, whether they are rich or poor, in a vigorous and flouriſhing

[t] Matt. vi. 31.

flouriſhing, or in a weak and languiſhing condition. To conclude.

5. LET us ſeriouſly conſider the certainty of a future everlaſting ſtate, the nature of its happineſs, and the diſpoſition of mind which muſt qualifie us for it. Tis certain that there is another world, as certain that I am only a probationer in this, a ſubject in the kingdom of God, whoſe laws have other rewards and puniſhments annexed to them, beſides thoſe which immediately follow the obſervation or the breach of them in this life; ſince they are not ſufficient to expreſs God's love of righteouſneſs and hatred of iniquity. From the goſpel we are farther ſure, that the world to come will be eternal, that [u] *the wicked will go away into everlaſting puniſhment, and the righteous into life eternal.* Hereupon let me pauſe a while and think—what is the duration of this vain momentary life to eternity? what compariſon between the happineſs of the one and the other? conſequently, what can be of equal concernment to us at preſent, as being prepared for a happineſs which is perfect and everlaſting, and which can be enjoyed by none excepting ſuch as are prepared for it? and wherein does this preparation for heaven conſiſt? without all doubt, it muſt be

[u] Matt. xxv. 46.

be in a temper of mind ſuitable to the happineſs to be there enjoyed; that is, in all thoſe holy habits and diſpoſitions which belong to regeneration; in one word, in that *righteouſneſs* which the Text ſets before us: ſo that if *righteouſneſs* were not more deſirable than other things, upon its own account, and for the advantages which ordinarily accompany it in this life (which it evidently is) yet ſtill, as the *condition* of eternal life and happineſs, and the only qualification for it, we muſt acknowledge it to be infinitely more valuable. To one who lays theſe things to heart it will be natural to aſpire after a holy and pious diſpoſition, and the nearer ſuch a one draws to the heavenly world, the better fitted he will be for it, and anticipate more of its never ending felicity.

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